

interesting points on how thinkers before and after Hobbes fit into the social contract tradition as a whole, the clear focus of these essays is on the man from Malmesbury, Thomas Hobbes, who stands at its centre.

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Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France Since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2011), 548 pp, ISBN 978 0 19 820313 1.

In 1796, during the politically uncertain years following the end of the Terror, Benjamin Constant declared that France's future was inextricably linked to the republican form of government and that its main challenge would be to put an end to the Revolution while remaining faithful to its ideals. *Revolution and the Republic*, a monumental book by Jeremy Jennings, presents an in-depth investigation of this claim and the related questions it poses: Why has the meaning of the Revolution generated such lasting controversy and enduring passion amongst the French? Can the Republic be a stable and modern political regime detached from its revolutionary beginnings yet fulfil its egalitarian and emancipatory promises? The book follows the conceptual and historical turns of the construction of French republican theory from the unexpected revolutionary days of 1789 to their bicentennial celebration, from the proclamation of the First Republic in search of an identity to the self-doubts plaguing a multicultural modern France. It shows how the conceptual tensions already in play at its revolutionary and republican beginnings can be tracked through to the contradictions of contemporary France and its claim to distinctive political thought.

Surely, the idea that the French Revolution and its complex connection to French republicanism provides the key to understanding modern France's tensions and contradictions is hardly new and has already been the subject of many important books. From Furet's now classic *Interpreting the Revolution* to Rosanvallon's *Le Modèle Politique Français*, Nicolet's history of republicanism or more targeted studies by Baker, Whatmore, Hazareesingh or Jainchill, to name but a few, the distinctive content of a French republican tradition has been the object of an intense debate. Yet the originality of Jennings' book lies in both its span and its method: it offers a meticulous and rigorous uncovering of the many conceptual layers of the construction of French republican identity, without imposing one specific narrative or sacrificing historical accuracy or theoretical acumen. The nature of the enterprise explains the

structure of the book. In line with a ‘conceptual history of politics’ (p. 27), the book is organized around a series of concepts, such as equality, representation, sovereignty, universalism, democracy and religion. While Jennings does not offer a systematic account of the selection of these different concepts, the reader easily recognizes the main objects of controversy shaping political theory and practice in France since the eighteenth century. Each chapter also follows a chronological trajectory, internally and more loosely as a whole, whereby the early chapters focus on the revolutionary period and its immediate aftermath while later ones develop the history of socialism and syndicalism, the role of intellectuals on the public scene from the Dreyfus Affair onwards, and finally the most recent controversies on the potential of French republicanism to accommodate the demands of a multicultural society.

The book appropriately starts with the French Revolution as the decisive backdrop to the history of modern France. Neither the Revolution nor the First Republic were quite what the protagonists of either event had planned. In the introduction, Jennings presents the debate surrounding the interpretation of these two events: whether the Terror was an accident or a natural development of the Revolution and what Jacobinism stood for in its historiography. These historical questions meet conceptual ones: can a Republic be centralized without being tyrannical? Can it be a pluralist democracy? How should the concepts of equality and freedom be interpreted in a modern Republic? Taking equality of rights as the passion of the Revolution and a main heritage of republicanism, the first chapter analyses the making and transformations of the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen* from Sieyès to its Jacobin offspring and its feminist reinterpretation under the pen of Olympe de Gouge. Following the criticism of the monarchical reaction and the utilitarian objections of the *Idéologues*, the chapter shows how the discourse of rights came to occupy such an important place in the later 1848 extension of the notion by the social republicans and the mature republican theory of the 1870s.

It would be impossible to summarize the range of the topics Jennings develops to convey the depth and complexity of the historical construction of a republican idea in France. Each chapter, articulated around a problem, presents the protagonists of specific debates, be they minor or understudied figures, such as Barni and Carrel, or major ones such as Rousseau or Tocqueville. Chapter 3, for instance, takes up ‘the long-standing debate on the influence of Rousseau upon the Revolution of 1789’. Coming to terms with Rousseau’s influence on the Revolution means, in a longer view, understanding the relation between republicanism and popular sovereignty, between republicanism and democracy. This chapter articulates the objections of the Catholic tradition — Maistre, Bonald, Lamennais — to the notion of popular sovereignty as well as the concerns of liberals with Rousseau’s radical conception of democracy. Finally Rousseau’s anti-modernist rejection of luxury and the related English commercial model began a long-standing

investigation in republican circles about the mechanisms capable of counter-acting what Durkheim identified as *anomie* in modern market societies.

The strength of the book lies in its in-depth coverage of the nineteenth century. This is indeed the formative period of French republicanism. An admirable quality of the book is its refusal of the usual caricature of the French republican tradition as a travesty of universalistic ideas and a Jacobin claim for centralized government. Instead Jennings develops all the nuances of this tradition as well as the circumstances that modified the way the French understood themselves. For instance, he analyses the role of counter-revolutionary Catholic trends in thinking about popular sovereignty, the importance of positivism or the role of socialist republicanism in refining the concepts of equality and freedom. One constant quality of the book is its nuanced and fair treatment of diverse theories. To take one example amongst many, Jennings' reservations towards Louis Blanc's theory of indivisible sovereign do not prevent him from laying out an accurate account of the republican socialist thinker: Blanc is not presented as a utopian or as an apologist of statism, but as a defender of France's *communes* and a proponent of proportional representation. The same could be said of many understudied religious thinkers and, of course, of figures like George Sorel who have already been the object of Jennings' work.

The appeal of the book is that it goes beyond the usual span of the history of political thought to encompass social, economic, religious and cultural dimensions. The very notion of commerce, the topic of a chapter investigating the relation of France to the English model, is central to the construction of a republican theory: can a Republic be a commercial society or must it be a virtuous one shaped on the Spartan model? In addition to studies of renowned philosophers, the reader will find insights about social and cultural issues, such as the role of the *Tour de France* in the construction of French identity. The role of intellectuals is directly investigated in a fascinating chapter, which takes us from Drumont's *La France Juive* and Barrès' nationalist objections towards 'abstract universalism' to the twentieth century mandarins, Camus, Beauvoir and Sartre.

The conclusion brings us all the way to today's France, where the relevance of republicanism as an attractive modern theory has been questioned. Taking up several ongoing debates, such as *l'affaire du foulard islamique*, Jennings shows how the capacity of republicanism to respond to contemporary challenges such as multiculturalism is disputed. Can the Republic adapt to the complex socio-economic reality of our contemporary world? Showing no complacency for the 'nostalgic reaffirmation of a golden age of republicanism' or the self-indulgence of French universalism, Jennings raises the real challenges facing contemporary France. While Jennings claims that he does not offer a systematic account of this period nor 'forthright conclusions', this disclaimer is deceptively modest. To be sure, he does not provide an

easy-to-remember formula to explain two centuries of French history and what makes French republicanism a distinctive theory. But the book proceeds with the tranquil certitude that such an enterprise would be vain and that we should, instead, be attentive to the logic of its different conceptual and historical moments.

Revolution and the Republic is impressive in its erudition and breadth, ranging from the Revolution to contemporary times and analysing scholarship on the main concepts of French intellectual history. Readers familiar with Jeremy Jennings' work will recognize many of his previous objects of research in this prize-winning volume, as shown in a remarkable chapter on socialism and syndicalism. Although a monumental book, chapters can be read separately. Thanks to a good index, the book is an invaluable resource for all advanced students and scholars interested in finding a dense, fair and sharp treatment of a wide array of materials in modern French political thought. The book remains of great relevance as the French continue to question their national identity, the possibility of a Sixth Republic and their public system of education, which would achieve their ever-demanding republican ideal of equal citizenship.

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