

Stanley Hoffmann, 1928-2015



Stanley Hoffmann, Paul and Catherine Buittenwieser University Professor emeritus at Harvard University, died September 13 after a long illness. He was eighty-six years old and had taught at Harvard for two-thirds of his lifetime. Stanley Hoffmann's scholarly work ranged widely from French domestic politics to American foreign policy to international relations. He published nineteen books and hundreds of articles and book reviews. A political scientist of an increasingly rare breed in American academe, he was more comfortable reflecting on philosophy and literature than electoral results, the latter never number-crunched but always considered in relation to a broader political culture. As teacher, scholar, and public intellectual, Hoffmann embodied the liberal arts ethos.

Stanley Hoffmann was born in Vienna in 1928 to an American father and an Austrian mother. He grew up in France, where he and his mother relocated in the 1930s, first in Paris and then in Nice after the defeat of 1940. Considered legally Jewish, though not raised as such, he and his mother found relatively more safety in the south of France, where he continued to go to school and was looked after by doting schoolteachers.¹ The experience fleeing Paris and then later the complete occupation of France understandably influenced his interests: "It wasn't I who chose to study world politics," he reflected in 1993. "World politics forced themselves on me at a very early age."² Returning to Paris in 1945, he entered the prestigious Institut d'Études Politiques (SciencesPo), from which he would eventually earn a doctorate after a stint as a visiting student at Harvard in 1951. Appointed to the Harvard faculty in

1955, he earned tenure just four years later and went on to found Harvard's distinctive "social studies" major in 1960 and what is now the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies in 1969; he remained vital to the Center's intellectual life until his retirement a few years ago.

For subscribers to H-France, Hoffmann will be most familiar for his very influential analysis of the Third Republic as a "stalemate society," a society characterized by its "equilibrium" between "traditional" forces including a large peasantry resistant to proletarianization and a resilient petty bourgeoisie that helped to slow the evolution of industrial capitalism.³ This stalemate began to break down under the pressures of the Depression and the political extremes it encouraged, and then the Second World War provided a decisive shock to the stalemate system. Hoffmann underscored the irony of this shift, for he claimed that it was leaders of the traditionalist Vichy—whose rhetoric vaunted a return to the land—that finally broke the taboo against state interventionism in society and the economy, thus laying the groundwork for post-war technocracy. After the war, Charles de Gaulle used statist "instruments prepared by Vichy" to break the stalemate and make France a modern industrial society, though not without some lingering political paralysis.⁴ In later years, scholars have nuanced the "stalemate" thesis, showing that the dynamism and state intervention Hoffmann attributes to Vichy actually dated to the late Third Republic and should not be attributed to authoritarianism.⁵ Others have suggested that the stalemate society thesis implies a greater equilibrium among political forces than there ever was, downplaying the many conflicts of the French Third Republic.⁶ In reflecting on these critiques, I am struck by how much the concept has remained "good to think with" and pertinent even to Hoffmann's detractors working on these issues today.

Although reputed to be a great admirer of de Gaulle, Hoffmann was no hagiographer. Writing with his wife, Inge [Schneier] Hoffmann, who survives him, he pondered the "costs" of de Gaulle's leadership style: "Things have been compressed and repressed that will inevitably reassert themselves," they wrote presciently in 1968.⁷ Hoffmann also at times wondered about the substance behind the general's performance of power. "Throughout the war," he wrote in 1960, "[de Gaulle] acted as if France were still a great power, in order to make of her a great power again. Has de Gaulle thus...fallen into Mussolini's trap?" he wondered, before answering his own question, "I do not think so."⁸ Hoffmann's inquisitiveness here displays his intellectual attitude: he always left a space for others to join the conversation. In our many exchanges, I did not always agree with him; most recently, our discussions tended to revolve around Islam in France and how to square multiculturalism with the Jacobin tradition. Although Hoffmann was once skeptical of "republican indoctrination,"⁹ later in life he reflected fondly on his own formation at the republican school and came out in favor of the 2004 ban on religious signs in French public schools. But, as Art Goldhammer has recently written in *The New Republic*, "one of the wonderful things about Stanley was how easy he made it to differ with him. In fact, he encouraged it."¹⁰

Stanley Hoffmann once wrote, "I study power so as to understand the enemy, not so as better to be able to exert it."¹¹ This could well have been his life's motto. His mild manner commanded attention and respect without any need for bravado. He was utterly unconcerned by rank and hierarchy, a stance not easy to maintain at Harvard, with its named chairs and competitive culture. Throughout his career, Stanley remained interested in scholars and students for what they had to say and how they reached their conclusions, not for their titles or GPAs. When I arrived at Harvard as an assistant professor in 2002, a time when it was still commonplace to refer to such positions as "seven year post-docs," Stanley never treated me as if I were on some dead-end street. Indeed, it was Stanley who helped me find the literary agent in France who eventually got my first book translated.

On my Harvard voicemail, Stanley's inimitable melodious voice still beckons, "Welcome to the Center for European Studies." Thank you, Stanley, for welcoming me and countless others. We will try our best to live and teach according to your example.

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¹ Author's notes on Stanley Hoffmann's reflections at an event honoring his life and work, 1 March 2013, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, Harvard University.

² William Grimes, "Stanley Hoffmann, Who Brought Passion to Foreign Policy Analysis, Dies at 86," *New York Times*, September 13, 2015, accessed September 14, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/14/books/stanley-hoffmann-who-brought-passion-to-foreign-policy-analysis-dies-at-86.html?smid=tw-share>.

³ The "Stalemate Society" thesis was most famously developed in his "Paradoxes of the French Political Community," in Stanley Hoffmann, et al., *In Search of France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963). An earlier version of the thesis appears in "The Effects of World War II on French Society and Politics," *French Historical Studies* 2:1 (1961): 28-63.

⁴ Hoffmann, "The Effects of World War II," 60.

⁵ See, among others, Herrick Chapman, *State Capitalism and Working-Class Radicalism in the French Aircraft Industry* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991); Richard Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Philip Nord, *France's New Deal: From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁶ See esp. Kevin Passmore, "The French Third Republic: Stalemate Society or Cradle of Fascism," *French Historical Studies* 7:4 (1993).

⁷ Stanley and Inge Hoffmann, "The Will to Grandeur: De Gaulle as Political Artist," *Daedalus* 97:3 (Summer 1968): 873.

⁸ Stanley Hoffmann, "De Gaulle's Memoirs: The Hero as History," *World Politics* 13:1 (October 1960): 144.

⁹ At the time of the first "scarf affair," Hoffmann reflected that a little diversity might do as much for integration as would "republican indoctrination." See "Thoughts on the French Nation Today," *Daedalus* 122:3 (Summer 1993): 68.

¹⁰ Art Goldhammer, "Stanley Hoffmann Was One of the Great Professors of Our Time," *The New Republic*, September 13, 2015, accessed September 14, 2015. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/122803/stanley-hoffmann-was-one-great-professors-our-time>.

¹¹ Grimes.