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Aurelian Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds: Moderation in French Political Thought, 1748-1830*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012. xix + 338 pp. Index. \$49.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0691-14676-8.

Review by William Olejniczak, College of Charleston.

Is there a case to be made for an emerging traceable body of thought in France in the period from 1748 to 1830 that can be characterized as political moderation? Aurelian Craiutu certainly thinks so. His intriguing aim is not only to raise appreciation for and correct misunderstandings about political moderates both past and present, but to argue that moderation deserves recognition as a formal body of thought for inclusion in the future study of the history of the French polity. He promises a sequel volume on France that will take the analysis from the 1830s to the present.

This carefully crafted work comes with a complex superstructure, including four meta-narratives, two major themes, moderation with multiple faces, and a balanced organization: the work is divided into two parts of three chapters each, bookended by a prologue and epilogue. The subject matter is traditional in its focus on constitutional and political thought, and the approach does not significantly depart from the long-standing scholarly tradition of the chronological study of the great Western political theorists where the focus is on internal comparisons and linkages among texts. At the same time, Craiutu laudably wants to go beyond a purely textual approach by examining the intentions of politically engaged authors, their lived experiences, and the uses of their ideas in specific political, social, and cultural contexts. Political moderates in his view have played a leading role in the emergence of legal-constitutional ideas and their interventions and reflections have contributed to the overall development of French constitutionalism.

This book is a call for greater respect for the pluralist, gradualist, tolerant, compromising political moderate who creates flexible, rational, political institutions. Craiutu clearly wants to raise the reputations of conceptually unappreciated moderates. Craiutu worries that moderates, unfairly labeled as bland, tepid, and colorless, have remained on the margins of academic research, while radical and revolutionary thinkers (his list includes Hobbes, Spinoza, Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche, Schmitt, Sartre, and Foucault) generate the excitement. For Craiutu there are moderates aplenty in the Western canon, such as Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Madison, Hume, Kant, Burke, Tocqueville, and Cousin, to which Craiutu adds Isaiah Berlin, Michael Oakeshott, Raymond Aron, and Michael Walzer. To this eminent group Craiutu makes a sound case for adding Jacques Necker, Jean-Joseph Mounier, Germaine De Staël, and Benjamin Constant.

In chapter one, Craiutu sets out to find what he calls the “lost Archipelago” of the underappreciated concept of moderation. For Craiutu, moderates are self-restrained, prudent, pluralistic, anti-perfectionists who advocate gradual reforms, reject Manichean world views, and steer clear of both radical skepticism and epistemological absolutism. Moderates understand that good thinking not only requires reasoning and deliberation but also intuition, foresight, flexibility, boldness, and self-control. Especially during politically radical periods, moderates have been denounced as dangerous intriguers, traitors to the nation, or enemies of the people. But it is in these periods, according to the author, that

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moderates display a deep courage and resoluteness in the face of majority opinion or radical opponents. More profoundly, Craiutu wants us to consider that moderates do not simply seek the classical “golden mean” (p. 5), but embrace a morally, ideologically, and institutionally complex center which is typically mischaracterized as weak and opportunistic.

This same chapter offers a brisk review of the pivotal political thinkers of moderation from antiquity to the Enlightenment. Aristotle’s foundational *Nicomachean Ethics* is credited with raising moderation from an ethical concept to a political virtue. Aristotle’s model citizen practiced prudence, temperance, self-restraint, and practical wisdom, and preferred groups sharing power in mixed constitutions of varying kinds. For the early modern era, French writers dominate Craiutu’s list. De Seyssel, Pasquier, Montaigne, Pascal, La Bruyere, Fenelon, Furetiere, and Jaucourt all shared a preference for moderation, institutional complexity, mixed government, and checks and balances. Craiutu’s insights ensure that this is more than the standard background chapter. At the same time, he follows a familiar framework of scholars of political theory who are interested in how the ideas of the canonical thinkers compare to each other; how for example, Aquinas appropriated aspects of Aristotle’s thought while rejecting others. Why these internal comparisons of early theorists matter, for example, to our understanding of moderates from Montesquieu to Constant is left for the reader to decide.

Chapter two is entirely devoted to a careful step-by step dissection of Montesquieu’s political thought, especially as conceptualized in *The Spirit of the Laws*. This stand-alone set-piece may be the best chapter in the book. For Craiutu, the spirit of moderation permeates his works. Moderate government is well-ordered and pluralistic and, most importantly, involves not a strict separation but a distribution of powers with somewhat permeable boundaries. A balanced government exists when the executive and legislative powers exercise mutual oversight and mutual control that keep each power in equipoise. There is a blending and mixing of executive and legislative powers that are bound together so that they must act in concert with each other. Montesquieu’s theory of political moderation and pluralism laid the foundations for all subsequent theories of moderate government.

In chapter three, Craiutu focuses on a small group of royalists who he styles “radical moderates.” They shared important affinities with the Feuillants and presented the best case for moderation in 1789. Not a unified group, these radical moderates emerged as the Estates General was in formation and became key participants in the debates in 1789 on whether or not France had a constitution, the declaration of the rights of man and citizen, the royal veto, bicameralism, and the relationship between the executive and legislative powers. Overall, they all worked within the intellectual orbit of Montesquieu and combined “progressive ideas” with conservative institutional proposals (p. 71). While Lolly-Tollendal, Malouet, and Clermont-Tonnerre receive treatment, the central theorist for Craiutu is Jean-Joseph Mounier.

Mounier memorably called for the assembly to “fix” the constitution in July (p. 84), arguing that, while no formal constitution existed, nonetheless the monarchy was based on fundamental sacred principles and the French were not a “new people that had recently emerged from the wilderness in order to form an association.” (p. 85). He participated in the debates on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of which the final versions of Articles one through three were his contribution. His fellow radical moderates among the *monarchiens* pushed for an absolute royal veto and a bicameral legislature, arguing for the necessity of an English-style upper house (with an open aristocracy) or an American senate in order to maintain an effective balance of powers. They insisted that there be a constant point of contact between the legislative and executive powers and that the king be considered as a representative of the nation. On the other side, according to Craiutu, were Sieyes and followers of Paine and Rousseau who saw mixed and balanced constitutions as “Gothic superstition,” composed of artificial, defective, discordant, and poorly connected parts that failed to guarantee political liberty and resulted in endemic corruption (p. 76). Critics on their left and right saw the proponents of *moderantisme* as hypocrites, instigators of factions, or chameleons. Arguments of the radical moderates for an absolute veto and bicameralism were resoundingly defeated.

Craiutu paints these thinkers as opposed both to the advocates of the wholesale destruction of the Old Regime and to the émigrés who offered no serious reform plans. Their essential contribution in their failure was to turn moderation into a tool in the service of constitutionalism and move it away from its prior role as a theoretical weapon against absolute power. For Craiutu, they fruitfully paved the way for post-Terror moderates who would focus on representative institutions as a means to end revolution.

In chapter four, Craiutu rehabilitates Jacques Necker as a legitimate political theorist, too often ignored by subsequent historians after he quit politics in February 1790. Written in retirement in Switzerland, Necker's later works disappeared from print for 200 years. Against his numerous contemporary detractors, including Jefferson, Mirabeau, and Condorcet, Necker pursued an agenda of political moderation. According to Craiutu, Necker suffered six defeats in 1789-1790: May 5, when his call for moderation in his 100-page speech to the Estates-General and warning that the past must be linked to the future went unheeded; June 4, when the assembly ignored his "conciliatory" proposal to resolve the question of deputy verification (p. 124); June 23, when the king refused to take his advice and make concessions; July 11, when he was dismissed; September, when the assembly rejected the absolute veto and bicameralism; and February 4, 1790 when the assembly decided not to grant the executive power sufficient authority. For the final fourteen years of his life, as a leading member of the Coppet circle, Necker ruminated on what might have been. For Craiutu, these years resulted in important publications, especially *De la Revolution francaise* (1796) and *Derniers vues de politique de finance* (1802), a bold and courageously critical work that so outraged Napoleon that the dictator had Necker's daughter banished from France.

Several concepts in Necker's post-1790 works merit attention and reveal one of Craiutu's many faces of political moderation. For the anglophile and self-styled connoisseur of the English political system, none of the constitutions established in France had any merit. The "incomprehensible" Constitution of 1791 was a missed opportunity to create foundations for a viable constitutional monarchy. Instead, it set up a "single permanent assembly...and...an executive power, without prerogatives...while it [was] stripped of all exterior splendor, by changes of every kind, which...deprived the throne of majesty and its ministers of respect" (p. 133). This constitution failed to create a proper balance of powers, its eclecticism rendering it impracticable. "Monarchical in its title, republican in its forms, despotic in the means of execution" the constitution was an "imperfect medley of every political idea and institution" (pp. 135-136).

The constitutions of 1795 and 1799 were no better. Here, Craiutu makes a case for Necker as a conceptually innovative political theorist who formulated the concepts of "complex sovereignty" (p. 149) and "intertwining powers" (p. 146). Too many French political thinkers, following Rousseau, had endorsed the idea of undivided (and popular) sovereignty, a concept that Necker rejected as an abstraction that rendered all authorities unstable and leading to despotism or anarchy. Complex sovereignty, in contrast, was a "compound institution," with reason and justice as primary moderating principles (p. 149). Necker's concept of intertwining powers was linked to the idea of complex sovereignty in that moderate political systems set up a blended separation of powers. French constitution-makers, for example, mistakenly excluded executive ministers from serving in assemblies because they became obsessed with the dogma of an absolute separation of powers.

This fatal institutional error was made in 1791 and again in 1795, while the constitution of 1799 created an overly powerful executive power. In each case, political liberty was sacrificed. In contrast, the English and the Americans had correctly linked executive and legislative powers so that shared governing and legislation could become a normalized give-and-take between the executive and legislative powers. The English constitutional monarchy in particular had brilliantly combined the responsibility of the executive power with the inviolability of the monarch by laying all responsibility upon the ministers and holding the person of the king inviolable. Both countries had developed a means

for the harmonious “artful intertwining” of each power even as they effectively held each other in check (p. 146). These mechanisms preserved liberty.

In chapter five, Craiutu seeks to raise Germaine de Staël into the top tier of political theorists, asserting that she predated Benjamin Constant as the first political moderate with a sustained and coherent treatment of constitutional issues. Madame de Staël is representative par excellence of the “elusive center” most conspicuously apparent during the Directory. Craiutu’s lengthy discussion of de Staël’s interpretation of the Revolution is another reminder of how questions that still animate scholars were posed almost immediately by the participants. Was the revolution inevitable? Were there long-term causes? Was it justified? Who was responsible? For de Staël, the answer was yes to the first three, and the responsible culprits were a despotic monarchy and arrogant nobility. What was the Terror? A descent “from circle to circle, always lower into hell” where all kinds of oppression were legitimized (p. 167). The “passion for equality” “fanaticism” (p. 166), and a “malady of the spirit” (p. 168), seized the Jacobins whose policies demanded absolute obedience and spread fear and distrust throughout the country. The formidable passion of fanaticism for her was even worse than the passion of vengeance in that it masked its true face under a veil of generosity and humanity. The republic had sadly arrived too early for a French people not yet schooled in it.

Trying to stake out a position during the Directory in the “elusive center,” de Staël put much energy into creating a *parti moyen* bringing together constitutionally-inclined royalists and moderate non-Jacobin republicans, but, unlike her father, she saw counter-revolutionaries as a serious impediment to an end to revolution in France. Before her forced exile in Switzerland in late 1795, de Staël in her rue du Bac salon briefly became an insider involved in the drafting of the 1795 constitution. Craiutu praises de Staël’s uncirculated *Réflexions sur la paix intérieure* which advocated, like Necker, an independent executive, bicameralism, and what she called a “union of powers,” where ministers from the executive participated in the legislature’s deliberations (p. 181). For this “enthusiastic moderate,” representative government was a progressive stage of historical development that had superseded the earlier stage of despotism (p. 162). Both constitutional monarchies and republics were valid forms of government, but the “elusive center” required that both be representative states that secured private property rights and accepted that men were motivated by self-interest. In the last years of her second exile, remaining a staunch Anglophile, she added decentralization, respect for public opinion, and a large lower house to the list of institutional mechanisms to end revolution and preserve liberty in France.

The restless Benjamin Constant, who Craiutu states is the most complex political thinker in this study, is left for last. In chapter six, Craiutu takes on the challenge of deciphering the political *girouettes* of Benjamin Constant, who is in the final analysis an “individualist liberal” (p. 235). Interpretation has to take into account Constant’s occasional and significant changes and additions to his many writings. The 1806-1810 publication of *Principes de politique*, for example, was significantly changed in its 1815 version. During the Directory, Constant switched positions from June to August 1795, first opposing the view that two-thirds of the representatives must be chosen from the Convention and one-third in elections and then favoring the idea one month later. Constant’s writings in 1797 showed a strong commitment to constitutional republican principles, yet he defended the use of “extra-constitutional” means to prop up the republic against royalists and Jacobins (p. 212). For Craiutu, these turnarounds can be explained when one understands that in the mid- to late 1790s, Constant was seeking to establish an “extreme center” (an interpretive concept that he borrows from Pierre Serna). During the Empire, Constant again flipped positions, first denouncing Napoleon’s regime, then supporting the dictator in his last days in power. Craiutu makes much of Constant’s passion, boldness, and partisanship to counter the usual picture of a weak moderate. He argues that a deeper examination of Constant’s works and life reveals a consistent core in support of political moderation.

Constant, more than other political moderates, directly took on Rousseau whom he admired and with whom he agreed on the origins of inequality. But concepts such as the general will and the general

interest legitimized absolute despotism in the form of popular sovereignty. Seemingly anticipating future Furetians, Constant noted that absolute sovereignty and power was not destroyed by the revolution, but only relocated from the monarchy to the people. The Terror was neither justified nor necessary for the public safety. It tragically unleashed new forms of fanaticism and extremism in the pursuit of excessive equality and delayed the consolidation of republican institutions. The only solution was to establish a government of limited or complex sovereignty, because even divided powers could decide to form a coalition to install despotism.

By 1806, Constant's analysis of what he saw as the flawed constitutions of the 1790s had convinced him of the need for bicameralism, an independent judiciary, and an absolute executive veto. Constant, like Necker and de Staël, searched for a *troisième pouvoir*, a balancing third party. But with the arrival of the Bourbons, Constant's emphasis shifted more towards finding mechanisms to shield individual rights and a private sphere for the individual. The key to a representative government was a neutral power which, after 1815, should be an inviolable hereditary monarch whose power would be separate from the executive power. Executive ministers and legislative representatives would practice shared governance. The chief function of this neutral power would be to protect individual rights and to resolve constitutional conflicts, as well as prevent alliances between the executive and legislative powers. This prudent and passionless moderator "floats, so to speak, above human anxieties" (p. 232). By 1822-1824, Constant advocated a constitution with a legislature that passed few laws, leaving most political and private life to the individual. Like de Staël, Constant preferred pluralism and reasonable compromise which was based on a complex view of human nature where passions and sentiments played a large role in political life; in short, an "animated moderation" (p. 235).

Craiutu has thoroughly digested the complete works of the major thinkers in his study and is a reliable guide working through the ambiguities of each writer. Endnote references reveal a command of English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian and a preference for the secondary literature of political science, political theory, political philosophy, intellectual biography, and important specialized works on political thought. Historians will recognize this as mainstream intellectual history ("ecumenical" is the author's term [p. 7]), accessible to non-specialists, advanced undergraduates, and the educated public.

Princeton Press has produced a book with thankfully few typos, but the annoying lack of a bibliography makes endnote reading that much more burdensome. The text itself could have benefitted from tighter editing. Restatements of claims already made may frustrate impatient readers. The length of the text matters because Craiutu explains that space constraints and balance prevented extended treatment not only of deserving important works and authors, such as the *Encyclopédie* and Sismondi, but also of the social and economic factors in the contextualization of the lives and works of moderate authors.

There are a few shortcomings. It is not clear, for example, in what ways political moderation is distinct from early French liberalism. Well versed in the literature on liberalism, Craiutu does not tackle this question directly, though he uses the term in his discussion of Boissy d'Anglas, Necker, and Constant. Is political moderation a "face" of political liberalism (p. xiii)? Second, Craiutu notes that the anglophilia of French political moderates naturally invites the very old question of why France was not England, but he does not pursue this theme systematically. We look forward to his promised study of English political moderation that will undoubtedly make this a central comparative question.

These minor criticisms, however, do not detract from this fine book. For those looking for a spirited argument for the emergence of moderation as a formal body of thought in mid-eighteenth century France and a vigorous defense of moderation as a valid and sophisticated form of political thinking relevant even for the politics of contemporary America, this is your book.

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