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H-France Review Vol. 6 (January 2006), No. 7

**Aurelian Craiutu**, *Liberalism under Siege: The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires*. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003. xv + 335. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$26.95 US (pb) ISBN 0-7391-0658-9; \$80.00 US (cl) ISBN 0-7391-0657-0.

Review by Richard Whatmore, University of Sussex.

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Eighteenth-century Frenchmen frequently complained of the loss of a prominence in European politics to which they had been accustomed since the Renaissance. In the first decade of the eighteenth century fears that Louis XIV would succeed in making France the first true universal monarchy since Rome were widespread across the continent. Yet within a generation both Voltaire and Montesquieu were describing the aspiration to universal monarchy as a preposterous national myth. With what was believed to be the largest population among western European states, the greatest natural resources, the most refined and polite culture, and a singular capacity for warfare, the perceived decline of France became a key conundrum of the age. Most commentators accepted that the state that had surpassed their own was Britain. Britain's rise was perplexing for the French because mixed monarchies had traditionally rarely been able to stand against absolute monarchies in clashes of arms, and in recent memory Louis XIV had himself pensioned the Stuart kings of England. The sources of Britain's new-found greatness were variously traced to a sustained martial prowess, rapid commercialization, public credit, and a latitudinarian religious establishment. The relationship between such factors and the constitution based on divided sovereignty created in 1688-9 became commonplace in French discussion, and closely tied to the question of how to regenerate the state. Recovering France's place as arbiter of Europe became a national obsession from the unexpected defeat at Marlborough's hands in the Nine Years War.

French politics in the eighteenth century are fascinating in part because of the continued experiments that took place in the hope of restoring French glory, up to the time of the greatest experiment, the Revolution, leading in turn to the creation of an empire capable of military victory on the mainland of Europe for the first time for a century. A most peculiar fact of eighteenth-century political thought in France is the unwillingness to follow the example of Britain in terms of constitutional structures and laws. Despite the popular accusation of "anglomanie", none of the so-called *anglomanes* from Voltaire onwards believed that France could or should adopt Britain's constitutional model. The main reasons for this were encapsulated by Turgot in his letter to Richard Price of 1778, in which he argued that the reformed monarchy of France was better prepared for the future than that of Britain. France had a more stable polity, a less corrupt commercial system, and a lower national debt. By contrast, Britain stood on the edge of bankruptcy, and the close link between its mixed government and its mercantile system was deemed to be the source of the unnatural and retrograde order of European politics. It was widely believed that in the aftermath of the collapse of Britain more stable conditions would be restored. The French expected this to follow the economic logic governed by national size, resources, population and general cultural sophistication. The decades of Britain's unnatural superiority could be forgotten, and a return made to the accepted norms of European political life, with France the hegemonic European state.

Of course, Britain and its allies ultimately weathered the storm of the First French Empire. In the process, Britain extended its commercial dominion, maintained its constitutional form, and lead the concert of Europe in 1815. It was in such circumstances that the writers of the late Empire and early Restoration concluded that Britain's political system needed to be embraced as a model for France, and

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initiated the genuine anglomania that characterised so much of French political commentary in the nineteenth century, from the promulgation of the Constitutional Charter on June 4, 1814. The great virtue of Aurelian Craiutu's *Liberalism under Siege* is that it explains the difficult choices the generation of French politicians between 1814 and 1830 faced in turning against their forefathers' perspective on Britain, when they advocated constitutional monarchy and mixed government as means to end the Revolution.

The term "Doctrinaire" was first used to criticise the apparent obsession with principles and theories in the parliamentary speeches of Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard in 1816. It was subsequently employed to refer to the group of reformers--Royer-Collard, François Guizot, Charles de Rémusat, Prosper de Barante, Victor de Broglie, and Hercule de Serre--who united together to push for a form of liberalism in France independent of Constant's individual rights-based doctrines, and the explicitly republican liberalism of Say, Dunoyer and Charles Comte. Although in his argument Craiutu uses all of the writings of the Doctrinaires, including those published after 1830, his focus is the political and historical writings of Guizot and Royer-Collard up to the commencement of the July monarchy. His intention is "to reconstitute the Doctrinaire's political philosophy by concentrating on their theories of power, publicity, representative government, democracy, and sovereignty, which rested on a set of more or less similar assumptions and principles" (p. 11).

Craiutu explains why the Doctrinaires defended regular and free elections, the division and decentralisation of political authority, an independent judiciary, freedom of speech, and specific civic virtues as the basis of a culture of political moderation. The central conceptual innovation of the Doctrinaires is stated to be an acceptance of democracy as a social rather than as a political phenomenon (an "état social" not an "état politique ou constitutionnel"). As Craiutu writes, "[the Doctrinaires] used the term *democracy* to designate the new *egalitarian* society--democracy defined primarily as equality of conditions and equality before the law, *not* as sovereignty of the people--rather than an old form of government suitable only to the small polities of the ancient world" (pp. 105-6). This enabled them to defend commercialization while attacking universal suffrage and popular sovereignty; the rule of the wise was called upon to create a culture capable of governing the homogeneous masses created by the modern trading system, and prevent their descent into a tyrannical democracy (which Guizot called "personal sovereignty" or "the sovereignty of number") or amoral materialism. The truly liberal regime would be characterised by the sovereignty of reason. The surest way of securing governance by those capable of rational discussion was to create representative government, by which the Doctrinaires meant the representation of the stable elements of modern society (meaning elements of the productive middle classes) as a bulwark against the rule of the ignorant mob, the corrupt aristocrat, or the self-serving king. As Guizot put it in one of the better-known paragraphs of the *Histoire des origines du gouvernement représentatif*:

"Pascal has said, 'Plurality which does not reduce itself to unity, is confusion. Unity which is not the result of plurality is tyranny.' This is the happiest expression and the most exact definition of representative government. The plurality is society; the unity is truth, is the united force of the laws of justice and reason, which ought to govern society. If society remains in the condition of plurality, if isolated wills do not combine under the guidance of common rules, if they do not equally recognise justice and reason, if they do not reduce themselves to unity, there is no society, there is only confusion. And the unity which does not arise from plurality, which has been violently imposed upon it by one or many...is a false and arbitrary unity; it is tyranny. The aim of representative government is to oppose a barrier at once to tyranny and to confusion, and to bring plurality to unity by presenting itself for its recognition and acceptance." (cited by Craiutu, p. 220)

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Craiu's chapters on representation are among the best of the book, placing the Doctrinaires evolving ideas about representation in a precise historical context. It is clear that Guizot's view of representation owed much to the Abbé Sieyès, whose writings have themselves been placed in context in Michael Sonencher's excellent edition.<sup>[1]</sup> It would be interesting to know Guizot's and the other Doctrinaires' relationship to Sieyès' lieutenant, Pierre-Louis Roederer, who is absent from Craiu's book, but who joined Guizot's Academy of Moral and Political Sciences with Sieyès in the 1830s.

One of the many commendations on the dust-cover of *Liberalism under Siege* states that 'Professor Craiu rescues from oblivion a worthy school of European liberalism, and opens therewith new perspectives on our discontents.' It is unlikely that many readers who have acknowledged the volume and quality of recent work in the major European languages, especially by French and Italian scholars, on the Doctrinaires would agree that this book is a work of rescue and recovery. Craiu's book is, however, the clearest statement of several central political ideas of the Doctrinaires in the English language and includes much information concerning the intellectual relationship between Guizot, John Stuart Mill and Constant that will aid the understanding of each of these figures. Two further contributions to current research need to be flagged. The first is the surprising fact Craiu unearths that the Doctrinaires did not believe that British institutions could be transplanted into French soil. Rather, against Rosanvallon, Craiu convincingly argues that the Doctrinaires were advocating the reconstitution of public life following the French domestic tradition of local government, political discussion and the co-operative division of powers. Recovering this French tradition made historical investigation so important to them.

This argument could be taken further as its implication is that the Doctrinaires were not as innovative as Craiu claims with respect to their anglophilia. "Lord Guizot", as contemporaries called him, emerges as a historian far closer to Montesquieu in his emphasis on the domestic tradition of intermediary powers between the people and the throne. The Doctrinaires also sound very like Physiocrats in their belief in the sovereignty of reason, in the need for the development of local institutions of government, and in the need to moralise commercial society. The second contribution Craiu makes comes through his scrutiny of the close relationship between the argument of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and Guizot's lectures and writings of the 1820s. Craiu reveals that Tocqueville borrowed Guizot's notion of modern civilization and called it democracy. This is important not just for Tocqueville scholars, but for all those interested in the redefinition of the North American republic as a archetypically modern state in the eyes of Europeans, so many of whom had hitherto seen North America as a utopia of equal landed citizens (and therefore utterly different to any European state) or as the last classical republic in the modern world, necessarily founding its political economy on slavery.

Another of the dust-cover commendations states, 'With wonderful clarity, sure-footedness, and even exuberance, Aurelian Craiu guides us through the thinking of the Doctrinaires and reveals their surprising relevance to some of the deepest problems of political theory today.' *Liberalism under Siege* is a work of intellectual history, but like so many books written by historians today it seeks to be relevant to the present. The current Regius Professor of History at the University of Cambridge recently stated that intellectual historians ought to challenge accusations of antiquarianism by questioning the presumption that liberalism is the dominant political ideology available to moderns:

"The intellectual historian can help us to appreciate how far the values embodied in our present way of life, and our present ways of thinking about those values, reflect a series of choices made at different times between different possible worlds. This awareness can help to liberate us from the grip of any one hegemonal account of those values and how they should be interpreted and understood."<sup>[2]</sup>

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Craiuu is seeking to do something similar in showing that liberalism in nineteenth-century France did not encompass as unified a set of doctrines as some historians claim. As such, it reminds us how far from the norm the Anglo-American right-based liberalism can be. All this is well and good, but the continuing emphasis on contemporary notions of political philosophy has led Craiuu to adopt a late-twentieth-century definition of politics which masks what a nineteenth-century French liberal would have meant by the term. Guizot and his friends were as concerned with restoring French glory as their eighteenth-century counterparts. Craiuu's book gives the impression that domestic politics could be divorced from international relations, and that it was possible to speculate on creating a stable regime in France without addressing the problems of the balance of power in Europe, and more specifically the legitimacy of the position of Britain as a dominant imperial and mercantile power. For nineteenth-century authors these worlds could never be separated, and a great part of the interest of their writings lies in their speculations concerning the extent to which liberal politics might change the existing international order.

A related point concerns political economy. In his conclusion, Craiuu claims that "From its inception, French liberalism has been political and historical, not economic", and states that Guizot and his colleagues "paid less attention to economic issues than did other liberals across the Channel" (pp. 281-82). If this had been the case, all French liberals, and especially the Doctrinaires, would have attacked as utopians whose ideas were irrelevant to a world concerned with the advance of mercantile commerce and its social consequences. It is rather the case, as Craiuu implies in his chapters on representation, that what the liberals in France, Britain and elsewhere were trying to do was to create forms of commercial society whose excesses were curtailed, and ideally moralised, by political, cultural, and sometimes religious institutions. Craiuu does not pay sufficient attention to the continuing controversy over Britain's model of commercial society. He also does not evaluate the contemporary accusation that Doctrinaire politics were Protestant, and possibly Calvinist, given Guizot's Genevan education, and therefore impractical because they were being applied to the still Catholic state of France. There is, overall, too great a sense of discontinuity between eighteenth and early nineteenth-century political thought. These criticisms do not impugn the quality of the scholarship of this readable book. Craiuu makes the reader want to return to the writings of Guizot and Royer-Collard, the greatest accolade for any work of intellectual history.

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## NOTES

[1] E. J. Sièyes, *Political Writings*, ed. and trans. M. Sonenscher (Hackett Publ. Co.: Indianapolis, Ind., 2003)

[2] Q. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998), pp. 116-117.

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ISSN 1553-9172