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Jacob Collins, *The Anthropological Turn: French Political Thought after 1968*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. ISBN: 9780812252163 (Hardcover, \$65).

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What does intellectual history study? Some scholars say it studies ideas themselves, independent of the systems in which they are inserted or the individuals who think them.¹ Others claim it examines contexts and what they make thinkable.² Others still maintain that it examines discourse—the linguistic web in which articulated thought is suspended.³ Finally, there are those who believe intellectual history considers a particular type of person—the intellectual, or idea generator, in their many historical avatars.⁴ In his disarmingly powerful book, Jacob Collins takes a different and perhaps more traditional approach: he seeks to capture an historical moment by considering an array of intellectuals who lived through it and sought to make sense of it—figures who are as striking in their similarities as they are in their differences. Collins’s study, in this way, recalls Carl Schorske’s *Fin de Siècle Vienna* or H. Stuart Hughes’s *Consciousness and Society*: studies that seek to capture the cultural outlook of a specific time and place through an examination of the multiple and conflicting voices that sought to define it.⁵

Collins dwells upon France in the 1970s—a topic which has been the subject of rigorous historical scrutiny over the past two decades, particularly on the part of intellectual historians.⁶ The seventies in France have usually been presented as a time of ideological and political transition as well as of decisive economic and culture change.⁷ Rather than focus on a specific ideology or cultural trope, Collins explores how a particular intellectual genre that he calls “political anthropology” became a barometer of contemporary concerns. In an era that was “indeterminate and defamiliarizing,” Collins argues, political anthropology represented “an attempt to fix meaning where it was fleeting and unstable and to overcome what must have seemed like a troubling destabilization of social and political signifiers” (5). By political anthropology, he means reflection on the question of human nature (i.e., ‘anthropology’ in the broadest sense of the term, rather than the academic discipline) that grapples with humanity’s political dimension while also seeking to make an intervention in current political debates.

Collins examines different conceptions and uses of political anthropology in the work of four contemporary thinkers, whom he considers in four successive chapters: the far-right polemicist Alain de Benoist; the political philosopher Marcel Gauchet; the demographer Emmanuel Todd; and the polymath writer Régis Debray. By tracing their careers and their intellectual evolution, Collins seeks to convey the indeterminacy of

¹ This conception was developed by Arthur Lovejoy and put to practice in his work *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936).

² This is the position of the Cambridge school of intellectual history and theorized by Quentin Skinner. Prominent examples of this approach include Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³ This approach is associated with historians influenced by postmodernism and deconstruction. See, for example, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) and Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982).

⁴ Examples of this classic approach include David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960* (New York, Macmillan, 1964) and Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁵ Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Random House, 1980); H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Knopf, 1958).

⁶ See, for example, Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2010); Daniel T. Rodgers *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011); and Christian Caryl, *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st century* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

⁷ See, among others, Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: the Anti-Totalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004) and Emile Chabal, ed., *France since the 1970s: History, Politics and Memory in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

this period and the efforts to resolve it by mapping the places where these projects overlap, as well as the interstices between them.

This selection of intellectuals is, in many ways, shocking. Rarely has Alain de Benoist been considered as more than a neofascist provocateur, a figure necessary for understanding the rise of the *extrême droite* and the alt-right, perhaps, but hardly someone who should be given the patina of respectability associated with the term ‘French intellectual.’ Todd’s hard-core demographic determinism would seem diametrically at odds with the more philosophical approaches pursued by the other three thinkers. Yet Collins’s gambit is that we can learn about this era by considering the unexpected harmonies and cacophonies that become audible when we line up the trajectories of these four beside one another. His study allows the distinct resonances between the concerns of these four figures to emerge. All are concerned with the historical and contemporary status of the sacred. They share a common preoccupation with the atomization of society and the frailty of what the French call *le lien social* (‘the social bond’). Each feels the need to reflect on the nature of the state. They all use history to make their arguments, and most cultivate a nostalgic disposition that had begun to arise in French culture. By examining these four dissimilar thinkers from the capacious standpoint of political anthropology, Collins captures some of the period’s more revealing intellectual idiosyncrasies.

The loose framework that allows Collins to study such divergent figures is considered at length by this forum’s reviewers. Ian Merkel praises Collins’s book as a contribution to the “history of the present,” but worries about the ambiguity of his central term, “political anthropology.” The term also troubles Knox Peden, not because it is vague but because it is a term so steeped in philosophical idealism that it is difficult, in his view, not to see the four thinkers Collins considers as being engaged in ideological obfuscation. Does the author risk condoning this ideology—and its reactionary implications—by not calling it as such? Sandrine Sanos invokes different substantive arguments to make a formally similar point. In her view, that fact that Collins does not consider France’s broader postcolonial situation as well as the unarticulated racial and gendered assumptions in his thinkers’ writings skews his analysis. As a result, she argues, he is unable to appreciate, for instance, how their “embrace of neo-republicanism, islamophobia, and gender conservatism appears to be the logical outcome of the normative principles they articulated as the desirable foundations for political community.” Collins addresses these critiques at length in his extensive response.

Participants:

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Knox Peden holds a visiting position at Australian National University. He is the author of *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavailles to Deleuze* (Stanford University Press, 2014) and, with Stephen Gaukroger, *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2020). With Peter Hallward, he co-edited a two-volume work devoted to the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* (1966-1969) that was published by Verso Books in 2012. His current research is concerned with figures of sin and grace in European intellectual history.

Sandrine Sanos is Professor of Modern European History at Texas A & M University–Corpus Christi. She is the author of *The Aesthetics of Hate: Far-Right Intellectuals, Antisemitism, and Gender in 1930s France* (Stanford

University Press, 2013) and of a historical biography of Simone de Beauvoir: *Creating a Feminist Existence* (Oxford University Press, 2016), as well as articles on European cinema and French literature. She is currently at work on two book projects: the first, *The Horror of History in Cold War France*, examines how figures and representations of the sex of violence between 1954 and 1967 shaped understandings of past and present wars, from the Holocaust to Algeria and Vietnam. The second charts a genealogy of French and Francophone utopian thought and imaginaries in feminist theory, avant-garde art, and radical political violence from 1968 to 1988.

Why were French political theorists post 1968 drawn toward anthropology? What kinds of questions did such an “anthropological turn” allow them to examine? And what aspects of politics and society does their work illuminate, whether in the context of 1970s France or as a methodological framework for understanding the present? These are some of the questions that Jacob Collins takes on in *The Anthropological Turn*, a welcome contribution to the very recent intellectual history of France.

Collins’s book traces the development and potentiality of what he calls “political anthropology” in the work of four public intellectuals, namely Alain de Benoist, Marcel Gauchet, Emmanuel Todd, and Régis Debray. In so doing, it provides a much-needed synthetic analysis of the lives and ideas of these four figures. Despite being quite well-known in France—and, at least in the case of Debray, in Latin America—these authors lack contextualization in the Anglophone world. Collins situates their thought in the zeitgeist of contemporary France, characterized by neoliberalism and new kinds of multiculturalism. He also adeptly examines the role of structural anthropology and (post-)Marxist analysis in their thought. Collins’s succinct and eloquent contextualization of these four figures ultimately allows him to show how authors of different outlook and temperament made “similar kinds of arguments about politics and society in contemporary France” (33). In this sense, *The Anthropological Turn* offers a kind of genealogy of the present. Although based on a much shorter time frame than a Nietzschean or Foucauldian genealogy, Collins’s book gives us an excellent intellectual background for understanding the kind of questions that are asked in the French public sphere today and how they are answered. De Benoist, Gauchet, and Todd, prolific as they are, continue to be visible and influential.

What Collins effectively demonstrates in *The Anthropological Turn* is that political theorists in France across the political spectrum have shared a profound interest in anthropology. Chapter 1 examines de Benoist, whose ideas concerning pre-Christian, pagan Europe as a source for social renewal have contributed to the beliefs of intellectuals on the New Right, most often with white nationalist tendencies. Chapters 2 and 3, which deal with Gauchet and Todd, respectively, allow for a more liberal examination of questions such as democracy, totalitarianism, immigration, and family structure. Finally, in Chapter 4, in many ways the most interesting one, we encounter Debray, whose itinerant Leftist politics were accompanied by a theorization of the sacred and an interrogation of the non-rationalist elements in politics. Indeed, if there is one thread throughout the book that would be most useful for political theorists, it is Collins’s attention to “the nonrational sources of human motivation” in his thinkers’ political and social theory (13). As Collins admits, these thinkers operated within a “distinctively French set of imperatives” that may limit their global transmission (15). Nevertheless, if an anthropological lens allowed them to better understand the challenges faced by their society in the transitions of the 1970s, such a lens might also help to better understand the current malaise and transition into what some are starting to call the post neoliberal world.

As anyone familiar with French intellectual history and social theory would recognize, understanding “the social” and social cohesion is a particularly French obsession. This can be seen in authors ranging from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Alexis de Tocqueville and Auguste Comte to Émile Durkheim, who called sociology “an essentially French science.”⁸ Beyond the social, there is also a prominent anthropological element to such thinking, especially after the rise of Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose work, along with that lesser-known André Léroi-Gourhan, permeates Collins’s book and the writings of all of his subjects.⁹ For political theory and

⁸ Émile Durkheim, cited in Terry N. Clark, “Émile Durkheim and the Institutionalization of Sociology in the French University System,” *European Journal of Sociology* 9:1 (1968): 36–71.

⁹ Jacob Collins, “Parallel Structures: André Léroi-Gourhan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the Making of French Structural Anthropology,” *History of the Human Sciences* 34:3–4 (July 2021): 307–35.

intellectual history, *The Anthropological Turn* offers an important contextualization of how and why anthropological ideas have permeated the public sphere in France from the 1970s onwards, as well a critical analysis of the uses to which the ideas of anthropologists were put. That said, it is worth emphasizing that few anthropologists would recognize themselves in the thought of de Benoist, Gauchet, Todd, or Debray. If anything, these thinkers are more akin to historical sociologists, whose grand narratives depend upon the fieldwork, archival or otherwise, of others. One might also think of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose research rarely took him far from Königsberg in Prussia, as a predecessor for this kind of “anthropology.”¹⁰

In the first few pages of the introduction, Collins sets the frame for why he has grouped such disparate thinkers under the umbrella of “political anthropology,” a term that he claims as an analytic one (4). Only in the penultimate chapter, however, do we finally see that it was Debray who used this term to define his own project (198). While one can appreciate Collins’s wide-ranging analysis of the anthropological in French political thought, it is not clear what exactly political anthropology means. Is it a transhistorical mode of analysis or a product of a particular political and economic conjuncture? Did Collins’s three other subjects understand themselves, like Debray, as political anthropologists, or is this simply Collins’s category for recognizing similarities across their thought? These questions, I hope, will push Collins to further clarify his method as he explores what he calls “the next major reconfiguration of the symbolic” (17).

The Anthropological Turn: French Political Thought After 1968 offers a valuable contribution to late twentieth-century intellectual history that should be informative for political and social theorists as well as historians of the present. It will make Anglophone world aware of how and why anthropology pervades both social-scientific and public discourse in France. If and how the present generation will use the authors examined in *The Anthropological Turn*, of course, remains to be seen. Almost certainly, none can expect to have the influence of the generation of French thinkers and public intellectuals that preceded them. Collins, recognizing this early on, uses them as a fascinating window onto the 1970s and 1980s and as a point of departure for future work.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, edited by Roberto Nigro, translated by Roberto Nigro and Kate Briggs (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008).

Jacob Collins has over the past decade established himself as an authoritative voice on contemporary French political thought. As an editor and contributor to *New Left Review*, he has produced a series of articles and book reviews that are as judicious as they are clear in their exposition. The synoptic overview amounts to a house style in the journal and Collins is a deft practitioner. The four main chapters of his monograph, each of which distills an intellectual career, will remain essential references for scholars interested in the thinkers in question for the foreseeable future. Grouped together, they offer a spectrum of French thought from right to left, beginning with the white nationalism of Alain de Benoist and ending with the Che Guevara-to-François Mitterrand adventures of Régis Debray. Along the way we also see the inner workings of Marcel Gauchet's philosophy of history and the roots in demography of Emmanuel Todd's celebrity as an acerbic critic of French secularism.

What unites these figures practically is that none, with the possible exception of Gauchet, is an "elite" thinker on the order of Alain Badiou or Michel Foucault (9-12, 31); each has contributed to the rough-and-tumble of mainstream political life via journalism or think-tank activity, or, in the case, of Debray, actual employment in a presidential administration. What unites them theoretically is that each one thinks of politics in anthropological terms. Collins is clear that none of his subjects is an anthropologist in a sense that involves fieldwork. Rather, they are each building on a legacy of French social thought that conceives politics mainly in a speculative and structural register. A recurring theme is the relationship of society to the "Other," and indeed at times it seems the book could have been as organized around Jacques Lacan's proximate impact as that of Claude Lévi-Strauss. For some, the Other is a kind of occluded origin; for others, it is concentrated in the immigrant, as a figure of the outside. But Collins's point is that the arguments of his protagonists, regardless of their ingenuity, are largely intelligible as symptoms of their political stances. He contrasts his effort with recent work by Stefanos Geroulanos and Emile Chabal, each of whom find themes of anxiety and uncertainty in the period.¹¹ Collins concurs and purports to give us more traction on the specifics.

The main value of the book lies in the subtle explication of these specifics, but there is a curious irony to this. For beyond offering a spectrum, the four chapters have a spectral quality as well. In a too-brief conclusion, Collins analogizes his effort in *The Anthropological Turn* to *The Holy Family*. Collins's study is more sober than Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' polemic against the right Hegelians, whose attempt to dispense with religion only worked to "rehabilitate it in thought" (220). But the similarity remains. The "idealist constructions" of Collins's protagonists "made it increasingly difficult to understand the material conditions facing ordinary French people" (220). It is a strange maneuver. The projects so studiously reconstructed in the preceding pages are in the end deemed species of obscurantism. Why were they worth the time?

The Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser defined ideology as a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence—a trait no less applicable to French intellectuals than to ordinary French people. Less famously, but more notoriously, he also argued that "it is impossible to *know* anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes."¹² These theses are related. In an earlier version of the introduction to *The Anthropological Turn*, Collins was explicit that the turn in question, at least in Debray's case, was a turn away from what

¹¹ Stefanos Geroulanos, *Transparency in Postwar France: A Critical History of the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); Emile Chabal, *A Divided Republic: Nation, State, and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹² Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: New Left Books, 1969), 229. On ideology, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation," in Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

Althusser deemed “Marx’s scientific discovery.”¹³ Philosophical anthropology is essentially a mystification in the Althusserian understanding of Marx. Likewise, it would seem, are the efforts of Collins’s political anthropologists.

The question, then, is whether mystification allows for degrees. All four thinkers are deemed representative of the “thought world of neoliberalism,” in which “political solidarity” is replaced by an emphasis on culture and themes of identity, community, and religion (35). But there are moments, especially in the chapters on Todd and Debray, when Collins seems genuinely impressed by the works in question. When he describes Todd’s *L’Invention de l’Europe* as probably “the most complete overview of modern Western European political ideologies that exists to date,” (158) is he merely marveling at an artful construction?¹⁴ Or does he think there is something more apt, more on that mark in this survey than in Gauchet’s “defensive and conservative” orientation to an always already secularized Christianity as the only source of collective solidarity (122)?

He who lives by ideology critique, dies by it. If you go around revealing authors’ intellectual positions to be little more than imaginary representations of their structural position, soon your arguments will be revealed to be little more than the same. Althusser’s solution to this problem was to bite the bullet and accept the consequences of an avowedly partisan position. Hence philosophy is, ultimately, “the class struggle in theory.”¹⁵ But this is a costly solution in that it forsakes any need for persuasion on the basics. In order to see the value in Althusser’s judgments, you have to be committed already to the dogmatic premises of his theory.

In his critique of the argument from authority that marked Lacan’s Anglophone reception in the 1970s, David Macey conceded that “not all studies in theology have to begin by proving the existence of God.”¹⁶ Likewise, there is no requirement that Collins elaborate and justify the Marxist understanding of neoliberalism in France that is the basis of his book. For what it is worth, he cites solid coin in the studies of André Gorz and Luc Boltanski and the latter’s collaborations with Ève Chiapello, along with Timothy Smith’s vital work in this area (227 n6; 230 n55, n56).¹⁷ But the recourse to this literature raises its own questions about the method in play. The baseline conviction of the study is that neoliberalism generates mystifications unique to its moment and geographical space. But what allowed Boltanski and Chiapello to discern things as they were, and by contrast led de Benoist to be mystified by race, or Debray by the nation?

Collins’s wager is that, since May ’68, politics has been displaced by culture. This is how I understand his schema of the decline of “political solidarity” and the rise of culturalist categories. But this gets into question-begging as we consider the work of, for example, François Furet and others who challenged the canonical Marxist understanding of the French Revolution precisely by suggesting that class struggle, like any politics, was always thoroughly mediated by the symbolic, i.e., culture, and that likewise culture has always been a political space.¹⁸ To appeal to the “material conditions” or otherwise invoke a reality obscured by culture is to perpetuate a discourse of purity as to one’s own theoretical apparatus.

The treatment of Gauchet is a case in point. Collins’s reconstruction of the complex dialectic involved in the understanding of Christianity as “the religion for the exit from religion” is brilliant, as is his genealogy of

¹³ Jacob Collins, “An Anthropological Turn? The Unseen Paradigm in Modern French Thought,” *New Left Review* 78 (2012): 31-60, 35.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Todd, *L’Invention de l’Europe* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

¹⁵ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*. See, too, Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 1990).

¹⁶ David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* (London: Verso, 1988), 20.

¹⁷ André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail, quête du sens: Critique de la raison économique* (Paris: Galilée, 1988); Luc Boltanski, *Les Cadres: La Formation d’un groupe social* (Paris: Minuit, 1982); Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); Timothy B. Smith *France in Crisis: Welfare, Inequality and Globalization Since 1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ See François Furet, *Penser la Révolution Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

Gauchet's work in the debates among Pierre Clastres, Claude Lefort, and Cornelius Castoriadis. More, his critique of Gauchet as politically reactive is persuasive. Any real social conflict in Gauchet's optic is at root psychosomatic, a breakdown of cultural norms. This attitude suggests paradoxes in Gauchet's own mode of nostalgia. He seems to want to go back to a moment of communal coherence in European history that is predicated on the very outlook—Judeo-Christianity—that led to the disintegration of that coherence. (Incidentally, in this there is a curious parallel between Gauchet and the center-right liberals targeted by self-styled “postliberals” who now believe that any form of liberalism is unsalvageable.¹⁹ Why rewind the tape if the transmission will prove just as decadent in the end?)

Collins shows how the turn to ethnology and the debt to Lefort seemed to inoculate Gauchet against Marxist accounts of history and politics. But in Gauchet's own reckoning he attributes much to Lacan—who, as Collins readily acknowledges, was of vital importance to Lefort and all theorists of the symbolic. In *La condition historique*, Gauchet goes further than this, suggesting it was Lacan more than anyone else who taught his generation to consider “division” to be more fundamental than “contradiction” in political life. The consequences are huge. For the Marxist, contradictions are to be resolved in practice. By contrast, “the latent model of the irreducible character of psychic division, heavily emphasized by Lacan, provided an effective means for getting away from the philosophers of reconciliation. It allowed a number of authors to exit from Marxism.”²⁰

If contradiction is the fundamental category, then Gauchet's account can only appear either blinkered or insincere. But Collins doesn't question his authors' sincerity; in fact, a main virtue of the book is how seriously he takes them, or seems to at any rate. This produces striking effects in the opening chapter on de Benoist, whose “metapolitical” approach to intellectual labor is itself premised on a kind of dissimulation. Radical positions are not argued for so much as intimated via suggestive contrasts, a distinguishing feature, Collins suggests, of right-wing political discourse (66). Still, there's no mystery about de Benoist's views. With varying degrees of intransigence, he has been committed since the 1960s to rehabilitating an ethnic conception of Europe that is thoroughly pagan in its orientation. This project has not been without strange bedfellows. For example, Collins cites de Benoist's debt to Joseph de Maistre and the counter-revolutionary tradition more generally (38, 52-3). More specifically, Collins points to affinities between de Maistre's nominalist conception of cultural identity—he's met Frenchman, Russians, and Germans, but never this “man” character—and de Benoist's account of the same. But de Maistre was hardly a nominalist on the essentials; the bedrock was a Catholic conception of the person torn between sin and grace, even if that formulation sounds a bit anachronistic. By contrast, de Benoist's nominalism was Nietzschean; there is no differentiating element among human groups apart from power. To be sure, Collins is mindful of this difference between de Maistre's views and de Benoist's, but he arguably cedes too much in accepting the basic analogy between the “counter-revolutionary” moments of the early nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. It is in the secular optic that is common to the pagan nationalist and the historical materialist that these moments look alike.

But de Benoist's penchant for metapolitics makes much of such analogies. “Metapolitics was,” Collins writes, “at its very core, a mechanism for the production of alternative realities, premised on a culturalist, identitarian conception of human nature” (77). What makes de Benoist interesting is that he developed his ideas out of “respectable” bases, chief among them Emile Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the linguistic anthropologist Georges Dumézil's arguments about the Indo-European origin of the pagan culture of the West. These were supplemented with notions taken from the German conservatives of the interwar years.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Sohrab Ahmari, “Against David French-ism,” *First Things*, 29 May 2019. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/05/against-david-french-ism>. Cf. Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

²⁰ Marcel Gauchet, *La condition historique* (Paris: Folio/Gallimard, 2005), 223.

Ostensibly anti-religious, de Benoist sacralizes race as a trans-historical invariant. Debray ultimately does the same with the nation, emblem of the Republic. Both are opposed to the flattening effects of the purely market-based secularity embodied in institutions like the European Union. Likewise, the immanentization of the transcendent more mellifluously expressed as “the disenchantment of the world” (108ff) is a kind of processual invariant for Gauchet, the schema by which he evaluates political history. The outlier here is Todd. His early mapping of ideologies was built on his variable analysis of kinship structures, but this seems to have given way in recent work to a more flexible account of social conflict shaped by the opposing poles of communitarianism and anomie. The decline of religion in France has resulted in a “zombie Catholicism” that is identitarian in principle and alienated in practice; the antidote, he suggests, is to be found in “zombie Muslims” who can infuse egalitarian notions and community ideals back into French life, irrespective of their theological provenance (166-67).

You do not have to be a Marxist to see something absurd in all this. It’s not just that putting his faith in zombies might, one hopes, lead Todd to reevaluate his understanding of religious belief. More problematic is that race and nation are each intrinsically mutable categories, and therefore bad candidates for historical invariants. Fortunately for his readers, Collins is not interested in taking pot shots at his subjects. The generous presentation of their work allows us to see what is problematic in them. The problem is that, at least in this book, the alternative understanding of politics to which each chapter serves as a foil is one that is only gestured toward or hinted at. If this isn’t metapolitics, it’s something like it.

In a passage that Collins cites from *La condition historique*, Gauchet remarks of the befuddlement that followed his initial enthusiasm for Lévi-Strauss’s structural anthropology: “During my reading, I could not help but be seized by the idea that the author had passed over what was of true interest in these societies. If they were nothing but an internal play of myths, then why go to so much trouble to establish their grammar and rules” (82)? “An internal play of myths” is a good description of the efforts Collins goes to much trouble to understand in *The Anthropological Turn*. The conclusion briefly considers Frédéric Lordon’s development of this paradigm in the current conjuncture. As ever, there is much that is elegant and compelling in Collins’s summary of Lordon’s project, which offers a Spinozist spin on the anthropologies of the preceding period. Yet in the end, this is a perpetuation more than an innovation.²¹ To explain political anthropology’s persistence, Collins suggests that it might touch “on something fundamental about modernity and the constant threat of social dislocation that it brings” (225). The difference here is between those concerned to understand something fundamental *about modernity* and something fundamental *tout court*. Dislocation is a constant threat, and yet temporally bound in Collins’s view by the normative project of modernity. But what if we have all only ever been symptoms?

²¹ A subject for further consideration in light of Collins’s spectrum optic would be the points of contact between Lordon’s work and de Benoist’s. Beyond the rough affinity between Lordon’s Spinozist generalized affect and de Benoist’s anti-Christian holism, there is their common appeal to the German jurist Johannes Althusius for alternative models of sovereignty. On de Benoist and Althusius, see Collins, 76. For Lordon, see Frédéric Lordon, *Imperium: Structures et affects des corps politiques* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2015).

Jacob Collins's ambitious and original *Anthropological Turn* proposes an intellectual history of four contemporary intellectual figures who have not appeared prominently in the canon of post-1968 French political thought because, in part, they did not fit the familiar political categories that have structured most histories. Despite their striking ideological differences, Collins argues these four thinkers—Alain de Benoist, Régis Debray, Marcel Gauchet, and Emmanuel Todd—have articulated an anthropological vision of the world that seeks to reimagine that which binds a people and its relations to the state. Yet, they remain little known in the Anglophone world and are “overlooked in historical scholarship” (33). To most French people, however, they are far from unknown, and Collins is right to say they “have had considerable impact on French political culture” (9); they have, in one way or another, been involved in some of France's most heated political controversies of the last two decades over the nature of republicanism, universalism, and Frenchness. Debray has been an important figure in the “politics of the veil” and in discussions about the relationship of Islam and Republicanism, which have consumed the French public since the late 1990s.²² He participated in the 2003 Stasi Commission, which ultimately authored the law banning headscarves in French schools and has been vocal in repeating over and over that “the former eldest daughter of the [Catholic] Church has not undertaken the Revolution only to now find itself Islam's youngest daughter.”²³ Alongside Islam—a racialized category that is, in fact, imbricated in questions of gender and sex—“gender theory” and the undoing of sexual difference have also figured in the polemical pronouncements of these intellectuals.²⁴

Ten years after the “headscarf ban” and almost fifteen after same-sex civil unions (PACS) were made legal, proposals for same-sex marriage legislation (*Marriage pour tous*) led far-right iconoclast intellectual Alain de Benoist—now a revered figure of the global alt-right—to rail against “gender theory” and “Judith Butler's death wish.”²⁵ He certainly was not alone: Marcel Gauchet relayed many of the deeply conservative arguments held by the *Manif pour tous* (just as he had in relation to the PACS and *parité*) as he “condemned the empire of individualism” and the problematic “infinite extension of individual rights” that the law embodied.²⁶ His positions on such matters led to the 2014 call by Edouard Louis, Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, and a number of critics, intellectuals, and scholars, to boycott the prestigious conference, *les Rendez-Vous de Blois*, where he was to be a keynote speaker.²⁷ The association of “gender theory” as a “set of American publications on sex and sexuality, which allegedly culminated in queer theory” certainly fit Debray's anti-Americanism: for him, “America” signified the dilution of French (and European) society by the effects of capitalism and identity politics.²⁸ Most recently, it is Emmanuel Todd who has become “infamous,” notably through the publication of a pamphlet denouncing what he deemed to be the moral and political injunction of a “sacred union” [“Je

²² Joan W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

²³ Cited in: <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/nouveaux-cahiers-du-conseil-constitutionnel/problemes-contemporains-de-la-laicite-publique>

²⁴ There is an extensive literature on the question of Islam in France: see among others Charlotte Nordmann (ed.), *Le foulard islamique en questions* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2004); Naomi Davidson, *Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Mayanthi Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Abdellali Hajjat, *Les frontières de l'identité nationale: l'injonction à l'assimilation en France métropolitaine et coloniale* (Paris: La découverte, 2012).

²⁵ Bruno Perreau, *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 75. On the conceptual and political relationship between the PACS and *parité* campaigns and as genealogies to 2013 arguments, see Joan W. Scott, *Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

²⁶ Perreau, *Queer Theory*, 159.

²⁷ See the call to boycott and follow-up petition: https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2014/07/30/pourquoi-nous-appelons-a-boycotter-les-rendez-vous-de-l-histoire-de-blois_1072778/; https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2014/08/06/pourquoi-il-faut-boycotter-les-rendez-vous-de-l-histoire-un-appel-collectif_1076316/; and the counter-petition: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2014/10/17/marcel-gauchet-victime-d-une-hargne-aveugle_4508128_3232.html

²⁸ See his July 2020 pamphlet, *Alignez-Vous*, titled to echo Stéphane Hessel's 2010 best-seller, *Indignez-vous*.

Suis Charlie”] in the wake of the 2015 terrorist attacks: he explained that it was nothing more than a “collective hysteria” and a particular symptom of French racism on the part of “white [Catholic] middle-class French citizens,” emphasizing the benefits of “immigration” against “Islamophobia.”²⁹ His latest 2022 publication on the question of gender and place of feminism in contemporary French society has again caused a polemic as he, too, turns to Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, to argue that contemporary feminism misrecognizes the anthropological fact of sexual difference and, by promoting a misguided “antagonistic” vision of relations between men and women, has established an “ideological matridomination.”³⁰

These four thinkers have all, at one point or another, denounced the supposedly divisive effects of “identity categories” of race, gender, and sexuality. This may have offered one common frame with which to grapple with the thought and place of these figures. Collins certainly gestures to these controversies (p. 44, p. 62, p. 121, p. 164-67, p. 210-11). Though he turns his attention to a different set of questions that he sees as making sense of this heterogeneous constellation of writers. He argues they are bound together by their effort to devise a response (and a solution) to what they have perceived as the uncertainties and disintegration of post-1968 society. They sought to move beyond a set of political theories that they deemed exhausted, from Marxism to liberalism and structuralism (though, in the case of de Benoist, the issue might be to reinvent a longer far-right tradition). Indeed, as Collins writes, “As social bonds were felt to be disintegrating across the 1970s, these thinkers reexamined the collective representations that had once held society together” (18). Over the course of three decades, they have identified “religion” (or its demise) as the “central issue in this period” (18) and politics an “affair of the sacred” (72). To do so, Collins argues they turned to “political anthropology,” which he defines as “grand narratives that sought to give greater definition of the “social” by anchoring its laws and histories in the deep and sometimes archaic past” (4). Remaking the conditions of the social required theorizing the foundations of human nature against a society characterized by “a collection of atomized individuals” (21). As Collins expertly demonstrates, they interrogated what they see to be the place of religion in the making of the social and the relation between secularism and republicanism.

Collins thus proposes an overview of the development of each writer’s thought, offering a close-reading of their work over time that offers a guide to how their intellectual orientation echoed one another. Turning first to Alain de Benoist, probably the best-known of all of them since he has been the “most translated” (37) and the topic of a long 2017 *Buzzfeed* article, Collins shows how de Benoist’s seemingly idiosyncratic ideas were forged in a particular post-Maurassian and post-decolonization far-right tradition that allowed him to elaborate a vitalist pagan and pan-European civilizational discourse opposing equality (as “coercive sameness” [52]) and claiming “Indo-European culture” (67-68) as the truth of “being” (61-62). He deftly traces de Benoist’s intellectual influences, from Dominique Venner’s “militant, pan-European [and virilist] white supremacy” (41) to Georges Sorel, Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, and the less expected Louis Dumont and Georges Dumézil. The intellectual lineages of Marcel Gauchet are just as crucial: his theorization of the *Disenchantment of the World* (108-09) emerged out in his youthful engagement with Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, both of whom were “preoccupied with the symbolic foundations of human society” (90), and with Pierre Clastres’s anthropological vision of power in “primitive societies” (94-96).³¹ His work has reflected on the conditions for “collective solidarity” (114), away from religion without sacrificing the sacred. Todd and Debray also turned to anthropology in order to interrogate the conditions for emancipation

²⁹ Emmanuel Todd, *Qui est Charlie? Sociologie d’une crise religieuse* (Seuil, 2015); Philippe Marlières, “Emmanuel Todd and the Great *Charlie Hebdo* ‘Sham,’” *Occasion* Vol. 9 (December 14, 2015), 2: <https://arcade.stanford.edu/occasion/emmanuel-todd-and-great-charlie-hebdo-sham>.

³⁰ https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/idees-et-debats/emmanuel-todd-dans-un-grand-nombre-de-domaines-les-femmes-sont-deja-au-pouvoir_2166128.html; https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2022/02/03/ou-en-sont-elles-emmanuel-todd-n-apaiera-pas-la-guerre-des-sexes_6112111_3260.html

³¹ Marcel Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde: une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); Claude Lefort, “Le désordre nouveau,” in Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort & Cornelius Castoriadis, *Mai 6 : la brèche* (Paris : Fayard, 1968); *Le travail de l’œuvre: Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); Cornelius Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) ; Pierre Clastres, *La société contre l’état: recherches d’anthropologie politique* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1974)

in modern democracies. Inspired by Frédéric LePlay while training under the tutelage of the English Cambridge School of social history (132-43), Todd claimed “family structures,” which he understands to be “structural and invariant” forces (168), provide the “key to all ideological phenomena” (132). As for Debray, whom Collins holds to be the “one of France’s most original and provocative thinkers” (169), he renounced his early Marxist and (failed) revolutionary commitments and “turn[ed] to anthropology” (192) in order to theorize power in relation to the state, global capitalism, intellectuals and the media. Here, Collins explains that Debray argued “just as had Benoist, Gauchet, and later Todd, that the political and the religious could not be separated” (193). Since then, Debray has theorized the “axiom of incompleteness” that “institutes the sacred as something social” (197), which shaped his embrace of French neo-republicanism.

Collins’s narrative and analysis of the French political landscape raises a number of conceptual (and epistemological) questions that will be of interest to those eager to examine contemporary French political thought. Indeed, his mapping out of the coordinates of the political in his engaging introduction frames how readers will encounter their articulation of the social over time. While Collins is careful to explain that he has deployed political “classifications” that “are based on the political traditions in and through which these thinkers developed their ideas (and not necessarily on the political positions they have taken through their lifetimes)” (fn. 15, 228), these forms of political identifications may have, at times, been further interrogated. For instance, Collins writes that Gauchet embodies “the political center” (5, 79): this is a puzzling description since, to most, he has long been a “reactionary intellectual” eager to police what he deems to be the causes of France’s “social fracture[s]” (123): social movements, strikes (122), as well as any critique of French universalism (be it the PACS, same-sex marriage, or anti-racist mobilizations) or alleged valorization of the “individual” (and human) rights above the social.³² Similarly, Debray has long been associated with a rigidly conservative neo-republicanism that, to some, is no longer part of the “socialist left” (4) and is far removed from his early radical engagements, just as Todd’s “Charlie” positions have coexisted with his unwavering support of the headscarf ban. In short, the book’s political framework determines the very political categories that orient our reading of these intellectuals: how might we examine their deployment over time? How do their positions fit within the evolution of discourse over rights, republicanism, and the meaning of “French” citizenship over the last three decades? How might have they evolved (or not) in exchanges, polemics, and conversations? Certainly, in the case of Debray and Gauchet, it would have been useful to see how their positions have been less distinctive and original, but also deeply contested.³³

The question of (historical and discursive) context is indeed a familiar “problem” of intellectual history, raising the issue of “contextualism” that Dominick Lacapra and Peter Gordon have warned against.³⁴ Context may also provide, as Omnia El Shakry explains, a means to here explore the “geopolitics of knowledge,” the

³² See the petition published on August 6, 2014 which denounces Gauchet’s ideas which hold that “women are naturally predisposed to pregnancy, that society suffers from the “marginalization of the figure of the father” and the advent of “psychic matriarchy,” that same-sex marriage embodies a “perverse apparatus,” that anti-racist struggle is a risky endeavor, or that LGBT claims will lead to the “annihilation of the social.” See https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2014/08/06/pourquoi-il-faut-boycotter-les-rendez-vous-de-l-histoire-un-appel-collectif_1076316/; On Gauchet and human rights, see Camille Robcis, “Republicanism and the Critique of Human Rights,” in Emile Chabal, ed., *France since the 1970s: History, Politics and Memory in an Age of Uncertainty* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 225-43.

³³ For an example of criticisms of Gauchet and Debray and the accusation that they are “reactionary,” see Émile Chabal, *A Divided Republic: Nation, State, and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 51-53. On historians’ interrogation of their own categories of analysis, see Gary Wilder, “From Optic to Topic: The Foreclosure Effect of Historiographical Turns,” *American Historical Review* 117:3 (2012): 730. For an invitation to reflect on the ways categories of analyses shape the relation of past and present, see Asli Igsiz, “Theorizing Palimpsests: Unfolding Pasts into Present,” *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 11:2 (2021): 193-208.

³⁴ On the risks of context as “exclusive mode of explanation,” see Dominick Lacapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 17; Peter Gordon, “Contextualism and Criticism in the History of Ideas,” in Darrin McMahon and Samuel Moyn (eds) *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 32-55;

question of “multiple temporalities,” the affects we attach to narrations of this “post-1968 moment,” and the unfolding of their thought, their objects, and their genealogies.³⁵ For instance, another narrative emphasizes that the “atomization” that these thinkers viewed with anxiety in the 1970s, signals a vision of the French polity which understands “minority” groups (and their new public visibility) to be worrisome and the cause of French society’s “fragmentation” because they were held, as Darcie Fontaine has so lucidly explained, to resist “fully integrat[ing] into the French nation” (its contemporary avatar is the accusation of “communitarianism”).³⁶ Fontaine explains that it is “this tension” over the meaning of republican universalism which “became the defining ideological debate of the 1990s and early twenty-first century.”³⁷ Collins does indeed point to the ways the “language of race, citizenship, gender, and immigration” were “central” (3) to these decades, and argues that these thinkers’ visions were “shaped by *decolonization* and the revolts of 1968” (224; emphasis added). How might have Collins’s reading been inflected differently when considering how these questions shaped the intellectual evolution of these writers and their relation to “neo-republicanism”?³⁸ Collins’s book therefore leaves room for the consideration of how empire and its aftermath as well as France’s obsession with Islam may have constituted a central term of these thinkers’ theorizations since any consideration of the “nature and power of the state,” the social, French republicanism, and Europe (10) is necessarily bound up in such afterlives, debates, and political developments.³⁹ The same is true for the economy, which was also bound up in questions of race, decolonization, and immigration in a post-Cold War global order and, which Collins notes, remains a “glaring omission” (219) in their thought.⁴⁰ If the work of these thinkers “could be described as an attempt to determine which sociological group constituted the true subject of French society” (21), what to make of the absence of discussions over the republic, immigration, and Islam with which they engaged and that derived from their vision of what constitutes the social, and how they were made to appear, as Joan W. Scott explains, as “fixed category[ies] of analysis?”⁴¹ One might argue that these thinkers’ anthropological elaboration of the (French) nation was crucially shaped within these contexts.

In the same manner, the ways certain political categories of meaning (those read as “identity categories”) inflected these thinkers’ work remains a question to be explored in light of Collins’s argument that this “turn” to anthropology allowed them to “make universal claims about ‘human nature’” (4) regarding “religion and the sacred, family, identity, and the state” (219). As a body of knowledge and as a discipline, anthropology’s historical embeddedness in empire and colonialism and in its distinctly gendered and sexed visions of the social has decisively shaped how “human nature,” the symbolic, and culture are understood. It also has a particular history in France where, in the twentieth century, the discipline has been deployed in the service of conservative political projects and visions that seek to naturalize gender, sex, and race as foundations to the social, as was observed during the PACS, *parité*, and same-sex marriage debates.⁴² What might be a critical reading of the invocation of the family and the social, as well as a critique of individualism,

³⁵ Omnia El Shakry, “Rethinking Arab Intellectual History: Epistemology, Historicism, Secularism,” *Modern Intellectual History* #18 (2021), 550, 553, 555.

³⁶ Darcie Fontaine, *France, Empire and the World* (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2023), unpaginated.

³⁷ Fontaine, *France, Empire and the World*, unpaginated.

³⁸ For an overview of the political context and development of “neo-republicanism,” see Chabal, *A Divided Republic*.

³⁹ See for instance, Daniel J. Gordon, *Immigrants and Intellectuals: May 68 and the Rise of Anti-Racism in France* (London: Merlin Press, 2012); Abdellali Hajjat, *La Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013).

⁴⁰ On this, see Muriam Haleh Davis, *Markets of Civilization: Islam, Racial Capitalism in Algeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

⁴¹ Joan W. Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2018), 4.

⁴² On the uses of anthropology and psychoanalysis, under the guise of structuralism, to support “familialism” see Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis and the Family in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); see also Bruno Perreau, *The Politics of Adoption: Gender and the Making of French Citizenship* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014); for an instance of the centrality of anthropological thought to these contemporary debates, see Jacques Arèmes, Stanislas Deprez, and Dominique Foyer, “Mariage pour tous et figures de l’humain: conflictualité anthropologique et postmodernité,” *Revue d’éthique et de théologie morale* 287:5 (2015): 67-84.

in light of this anthropological essentialism? Collins's demonstration that Émile Durkheim proved a common reference for de Benoist, Gauchet, and Debray who "made different uses of Durkheim's theory" (71-72) is especially fascinating. What might this mean for their political theory if we consider Durkheim's gendered underpinnings of his vision of the social? As Judith Surkis has demonstrated, "conjugal heterosexuality" was considered both a "matrix" and "crucible of sociality," leading Durkheim to argue that the making of the (male) republican citizen needed a sexual division of labor and the familiar and conjugal binding that anchored the social.⁴³ Indeed, as Collins writes, since "all four thinkers borrowed from Durkheim the idea that the weakening of social cohesion led to a disillusioned, atomized society" (73), their involvement in recent controversies (for instance with Todd's recent argument that feminism has perverted the universal and transhistorical social form of the family) and embrace of neo-republicanism, islamophobia, and gender conservatism appears to be the logical outcome of the normative principles they articulated as the desirable foundations for political community.⁴⁴

These questions may be a consequence of the genre of intellectual history that Collins deploys here. One of the strengths of this study lies in his choice to "give systematic rather than passing attention to each thinker and to show how their ideas were shaped contextually through different political and institutional commitments" (36)—an impressive feat considering the idiosyncratic trajectories of these thinkers. Each chapter follows the format of an intellectual biography that provides a compelling unearthing of the intellectual genealogies that have shaped their thought. Thinking of their work as a "unified whole" (36), however, risks inadvertently translating their thought into self-contained and bounded texts, with little sense on how they were received or even engaged the very terms of the political debates and context they were talking to. Taking texts as "unbounded sites of unresolved contestation rather than closer, organic 'works'" that express "consistent and coherent ideas" might have yielded different interpretations of these writers' "anthropological turn."⁴⁵ Here, it might be interesting to get a sense of the tensions and contradictions that might have haunted the evolution of these writers' thought, or how they might have engaged one another (or not). Indeed, we learn in a footnote that the "most comprehensive review [of Debray's *Critique de la raison politique*] came from the pen of Alain de Benoist" (258 n126) or that Gauchet's magazine *Le débat* devoted a critical forum to Todd's 1998 *L'Illusion Économique* (251 n121). In the same manner, it would have been interesting to see how Gauchet and Debray encountered one another in their 2003 "debate" in the pages of *Le débat*.⁴⁶ Considering Collins's convincing argument regarding the "formative role played by the French social sciences in contemporary political thought" (33) and these authors' claims to be redefining the social, one wonders about their relationship with others who also turned to anthropology, since these four thinkers were certainly not alone in doing so in those years; or their engagement with sociology, the discipline that came to prominence in the 1970s and, in the following decades, also made a claim to reimagining the foundations of the political and democracy—as Pierre Bourdieu and others did.⁴⁷ What then constitutes this "anthropological turn?" As Surkis has so astutely noted, the language of "turn" usually assumes a "a singular coherent 'turn' having taken place" and "signals innovation and renewal."⁴⁸ Yet, what Collins traces as "an

⁴³ See Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 9, 11; and my review "The Subject and the Work of Difference: Gender, Sexuality, and Intellectual History," *Modern Intellectual History* 8:1(2011): 213-225.

⁴⁴ Perreau, *Queer Theory*, 22. On the emergence of the so-called "Islamophobie de plume," see Abedlali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed, *Islamophobie: comment les élites françaises fabriquent le 'problème musulman'* (Paris: La découverte, 2013).

⁴⁵ Martin Jay, "'Hey What's the Big Idea?' Ruminations on the Question of Scale in Intellectual History," *New Literary History* 48:4 (2017): 619.

⁴⁶ On a comparison of Gauchet and Debray and this "debate," see Michael Behrent, "Religion, Republicanism, and Depoliticization: Two Intellectual Itineraries—Régis Debray and Marcel Gauchet," in Julian Bourg, ed., *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 345-46.

⁴⁷ On others turning to Durkheim such as Dominique Schnapper, for instance, see Sophie Guérard de Latour, "Cultural Insecurity and Political Solidarity: French Republicanism Reconsidered," in Chabal, ed., *France since the 1970s*, 245-62.

⁴⁸ Judith Surkis, "When was the Linguistic Turn? A Genealogy," *American Historical Review* 117:3 (2012): 702.

attempt to fix meaning where it was fleeting and unstable and to overcome what must have seemed like a troubling destabilization of social and political signifiers” (4) might also be read as a nostalgic turn to the archaic and yearning for unity and wholeness as these thinkers negotiated the vagaries of a changing society.⁴⁹

Ultimately, the four biographical chapters work as separate essays, revealing both the possibilities and limits of the biographical as a genre. The conclusion best embodies this tension as Collins turns to Frédéric Lordon, whose thought Collins situates in this “anthropological turn” but who appears to not have jettisoned the economy in his reimagining of the social (Lordon—another little examined thinker— might have been the subject of his own chapter). Lordon and Gauchet were among the sixty-five intellectuals and scholars invited to participate in the March 2019 televised *Grand débat des idées* organized by President Emmanuel Macron. That they were is a reminder of the importance of Collins’s study (Lordon was alone in pointedly and publicly refusing to partake in such “sham” operation, while Gauchet ultimately failed to attend). Collins’s book leaves us thinking about the enduring yet politically contingent appropriation and deployment of anthropology, as well as its relation to the post-decolonization contexts that are so central to contemporary debates, and that reveal the entanglement of these writers’ obsessions and their embeddedness in a political world that was never just “French.” In doing so, his turn to prominent yet “overlooked” intellectual figures opens up an important lens for understandings of contemporary French political thought and some of its genealogies.

⁴⁹ On Gauchet’s “nostalgic visions,” see Scott, *Parité*, 33.

 Response by Jacob Collins, City University of New York, College of State Island

I am fortunate to have received such a rich and engaging set of replies to my book. The questions raised by the commentators have challenged me to clarify the book's arguments, but also to think more deeply about what it means to write about politics and ideas in France today. So I will begin by expressing my gratitude to Ian Merkel, Knox Peden, and Sandrine Sanos for their comments and questions, and to Michael Behrent for bringing them all together in his introduction. I would also like to thank Diane Labrosse for editing the discussion, and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins for setting the whole process in motion. As I see it, the questions raised by the commentators can be divided into three categories: the book's main concepts; its political classifications and judgments; and its methodologies. I address each in turn below.

To construct the paradigm I call "the anthropological turn," (17) I grouped together four thinkers who come from different political traditions in France, but who nevertheless share a similar way of interpreting 'the social.' None of them were anthropologists in the usual sense: they had no formal training in the discipline, and did not see themselves as members of it. So if anthropologists did not recognize themselves in the work of the four thinkers, and the four thinkers did not recognize themselves as anthropologists, why, Merkel asks pointedly, call them "political anthropologists" (5)? I wanted the phrase to capture how the language of the social sciences has come to permeate France's public sphere, and inform the terms of its political and social debate. This has clearly persisted to the present day, since there is virtually no topic of cultural controversy in France that is not filtered through an anthropological lens: the headscarf affair, immigration, same-sex parenting, gay marriage, to name only a few, are typically framed as a matter of incompatibility between a given social practice and an implied 'French' way of doing things. In French discourse around the war in Ukraine, commentators often invoke the deep cultural differences between the English, Germans, and French.

This way of talking about politics strikes me as particularly French, and related to the assimilationist outlook of the state. The presumption is that non-dominant cultures, both within France and in the colonies, would be uplifted by French civilization, and should therefore conform to its standards. As Sanos rightly says, anthropology was historically embedded in France's empire and helped shape understandings of 'human nature.' We could also point to the role of Claude Lévi-Strauss in attempting to sever French anthropology's link to empire after the Second World War and make it into a universalist discipline that could explain all configurations of human nature.⁵⁰ This elevated the prestige of anthropology and gave it a central place in French intellectual life.

Another reason for applying the "political anthropology" label is to identify what I take to be a particular mode of theorizing in the 1970s, a kind of 'grand narrative' situated at the intersection of philosophy, history, and anthropology. Its ostensible aim was to tackle 'big' questions and construct systematic theories of 'human nature' and 'society,' much in the way nineteenth-century social scientists had done. In a broad sense, this marked a change of intellectual course, for as Quentin Skinner notes in his essay "The Return of Grand Theory," social scientists of the 1950s and 1960s were reluctant to engage in this kind of abstract and normative theorizing because they regarded it as outdated and an obstacle to value-neutral scientific analysis.⁵¹ "Grand theory" returned because the revolts of the 1960s destabilized social categories, broke down hierarchies, and opened the possibility of forming new social and political relationships. An emergent eco-consciousness was at work here too: amid mounting evidence of human beings' destruction of the planet and the environmental costs of economic growth, social and political theorists began to reevaluate humans' relationship to the natural world, and reinterpret the meaning of human history. In this respect, Merkel is

⁵⁰ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell et al (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), and *Race and History* (New York: UNESCO, 1952).

⁵¹ Quentin Skinner, "Introduction: The Return of Grand Theory," in Quentin Skinner, ed. *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3.

right to compare the “grand theory” of the 1970s to the speculative anthropology of the Enlightenment, which developed as a challenge to the theological understanding of the world. If the proper study of mankind was not God but ‘man,’ how could human beings be understood in all their cultural diversity? Why did some peoples seem more ‘primitive’ than others? In what direction was history moving? Merkel cites Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* as an example of this armchair-mode of theorizing, but there were many others too: Giambattista Vico’s *New Science*, Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Another Philosophy of History*, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*.⁵²

“Anthropology” seems suited to the conjuncture of the 1970s for another reason too: French thinkers’ newfound preoccupation with ideas of the ‘savage’ and the ‘primitive.’ Some of this seemed coincidental: the French term for ‘wildcat strike’—a technique used widely in 1968 to sidestep union surveillance—is ‘grève sauvage.’ I noticed too that Marxist theorists were suddenly interested in ideas of “primitive accumulation,” and were reading not *Capital* but the *Grundrisse* (which has long sections on pre-capitalist economic formations).⁵³ But what seemed more deliberate were the many attempts to invoke the figure of the “savage” as a political and philosophical ideal—a utopian, counter-civilizational image that social movements could embrace. In an interview from 1976, the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis claimed that “the longest-lasting things have been said not by the ‘civilizers’ but by ‘savages’ who arise suddenly from the depths of society.”⁵⁴ In *The Mirror of Production*, Jean Baudrillard wrote of “the savage social movements that were born in a symbolic situation of rupture.”⁵⁵ The central chapter of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* was titled “Savagery, Barbarism, Civilization,” and implied that ‘savages,’ who did not know the state, lived as close as possible to the idyllic liberation of schizophrenia.⁵⁶

Professional anthropologists like Pierre Clastres and Jacques Lizot were able to enrich these comparisons with fieldwork and genuine anthropological knowledge.⁵⁷ What they revealed of the forest cultures of the Amazon turned out to be highly compatible with the ethos of 1968: they shared a common rejection of the state, market relations, political power, and aimed to live a simpler, more communally oriented way of life. As Claude Lefort announced in the first editorial of *Libre*, the journal he co-founded with Gauchet and Clastres, research into “the savage” had opened new paths of inquiry and modes of reflection after 1968.⁵⁸ Ironically, this came at a moment when European historians seemed more aware than ever of how the “noble savage” motif had been used as a pretext for colonial conquest and dispossession.⁵⁹

There was also the fact that each of the thinkers developed their work in dialogue with a particular French anthropologist: for Debray, it was André Leroi-Gourhan; for Todd, Frédéric Le Play; for Gauchet, Lévi-Strauss/Clastres; and for Alain de Benoist, Georges Dumézil. Thus, the idea of “the anthropological turn” is

⁵² Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2004); and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵³ See Maurice Godelier’s long preface to *Sur les sociétés pré-capitalistes: Textes choisis de Marx, Engels, Lenin* (Paris: Centre d’études et de recherches marxistes, 1970).

⁵⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Revolutionary Exigency,” *Political and Social Writings*, vol. 3, *Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society*, trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 238.

⁵⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1975), 164.

⁵⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

⁵⁷ Pierre Clastres, *La Société contre l’état: recherches d’anthropologie politique* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1974); Jacques Lizot, “Population, ressources et guerre chez les Yanomami: critique de l’anthropologie écologique,” *Libres* 2 (1977): 111-147.

⁵⁸ Claude Lefort, “Maintenant,” *Libre* 1 (1977): 3-28, 12.

⁵⁹ Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1971); Bernadette Bucher, *La Sauvage aux seins pendants* (Paris: Hermann, 1977).

meant to encompass all of these things: the methodology of the four thinkers; the thematic currents of the 1970s; and the cross-generational conversation between lay intellectuals and professional anthropologists. To me, this adds up to a larger political-intellectual framework that required explanation. Merkel asks whether what the four thinkers were doing was closer to “historical sociology” than to anthropology. This is indeed an apt description, but it could be argued that there was not such a great difference between sociology and cultural anthropology at the time. The two fields were virtually identical through the early twentieth century and even into the postwar era. As Merkel acknowledges in his excellent new book, *Terms of Exchange*, Lévi-Strauss taught in a sociology department for years and often situated his work within the field of sociology.⁶⁰ I do not therefore insist on a strict application of “anthropology,” and per Merkel’s comment, it would have been interesting to consider the work of historically minded sociologists—Robert Castel or Gérard Noiriel—within the space of the anthropological turn.

From another angle, Peden suggests that the book could have been organized around the Lacanian theme of the ‘Other,’ since this emerges as a key problematic for each thinker. Peden has a point here. There is a loose and casual sense in which the authors use psychoanalytic concepts in their work, as when Todd, for instance, discusses the authoritarian reflexes of the working class in the 1970s, or makes reference to the narcissism of elites. Then there is a more specific sense in which psychoanalytic ideas of ‘the symbolic’ and ‘the other’ sit at the foundation of these political-anthropological systems. This is especially true for Gauchet, who engaged directly with Lacan (and Freud), and Debray, who discusses psychoanalysis at length in the *Critique de la raison politique* (but not in any specifically Lacanian sense).⁶¹ I would have liked to have given these themes and tropes more attention, but chose to weight the project toward the social sciences (for reasons mentioned above). Fortunately, there are two works in the field that cover this area better than I could ever hope to: Camille Robcis’s *The Law of Kinship*, and Warren Breckman’s *Adventures of the Symbolic*.⁶²

Finally, I decided to qualify “anthropology” with “political” because the latter term held special significance for thinkers of the 1970s. In their attempt to break with established ideologies, many intellectuals of this period aimed to theorize “the political” as an autonomous space of activity. Politics in this sense (‘le politique’) was not the everyday stuff of policymaking (‘la politique’), but a zone of interaction with its own rules and logic, existing independently of any prior determinations. Defining ‘le politique’ was a theoretical priority for de Benoist, Debray, and Gauchet (and other thinkers of this period, like Claude Lefort and Castoriadis), who were reacting to the way liberalism and Marxism reduced political relations to economic ones. “Political anthropology” was a term already in circulation within French anthropology in the late 1960s. It brought together thinkers who wished to see their discipline engage more directly with political concepts, and who thought that structuralism was too formalistic and abstract to address issues of contemporary life. Georges Balandier, a renowned anthropologist of Africa, published a primer on the subject in 1967, *Anthropologie politique*, and defined the sub-discipline’s field of inquiry as follows: “what are the ‘circuits’ that explain why certain men can command others? How is the relation of command and obedience established?”⁶³ He also wanted to know why power seemed to function differently in stateless and statist societies. Given that the thinkers I look at were interested in pursuing a similar set of questions—about the nature of command and the development of the state—I thought the term could be extended beyond anthropology to capture a broader theoretical moment in France.

⁶⁰ Ian Merkel, *Terms of Exchange: Brazilian Intellectuals and the French Social Sciences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 54-5.

⁶¹ Régis Debray, *Critique de la raison politique, ou l'inconscient religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981). In English translation: *Critique of Political Reason*, trans. David Macey (London: New Left Books, 1983).

⁶² Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Warren Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic: Postmarxism and Democratic Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

⁶³ Georges Balandier, *Anthropologie politique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France), 1967. Cited here is the English translation: *Political Anthropology*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Allen Lane, 1970), 32.

Sanos has asked me to clarify the political identifications at work in *The Anthropological Turn*. The chapters are sequenced politically from Right to Left, beginning with de Benoist, then moving to Gauchet and Todd in the center, and then to Debray on the Left. One of the reasons I decided to undertake this project was to survey a wide spectrum of political thinking in France, and place different ideological traditions in conversation with one another. It seemed to me that few books in the field covered Left, Right, and center in one integrated analysis. Nevertheless, the task of categorizing the four thinkers was not easy given how much each has moved around politically over the years. On what basis were these particular classifications made?

The spectrum adopted in the book reflects the outlook of the four thinkers as of the late 1970s, when political and ideological divisions in the country began to harden around the prospect of the Left's electoral victory. If we look earlier in the decade, the political field was far more fluid: Debray was migrating from a revolutionary *tiers-mondisme* to Eurocommunism; Todd from his youthful support of the French Communist Party to a Cold War liberalism; Gauchet from 'the Second Left' to a more conservative liberalism; and de Benoist from a biological racism to a more respectable-seeming politics of cultural difference. The probable victory of the united Left in the late 1970s created a more stable set of alignments. Thus, in a more specific sense, the classifications represent where the thinkers stood in relation to the social-democratic politics of the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) in the late 1970s—a program of economic redistribution supported by broad sections of the working class and the lower echelons of the white-collar work force. De Benoist regarded these politics with utter revulsion; Gauchet broke with the Second Left (which never supported François Mitterrand), and moved farther right by joining the liberal opposition; Todd was cautiously optimistic that a Socialist administration could shed its authoritarian baggage; and Debray, who was closely affiliated with Mitterrand, served in his first government.

How tenable, asks Sanos, are these characterizations? Do the four thinkers in fact represent such a broad spectrum of opinion in France? If we judge their politics from a different angle of vision—for example, according to how they view gender and Islam in France—won't their politics appear to be quite similar, converging toward a neo-republican consensus? In the case of Gauchet, why call him a thinker of the center when he is often regarded as a reactionary intellectual, hostile to unions, social movements, feminism, and same-sex marriage? Can Debray be said to represent French socialism when he has long embraced “a rigidly conservative neo-republicanism?” Here I would point to how the anthropological turn was constituted in the mid-1970s. On the one hand, it was an attempt to rethink ‘the social’ by anchoring its laws and histories in the deep past. In this sense, their anthropological systems were posed as a confident alternative to the declining ideologies of the time: Gaullism, Communism, and Catholicism. On the other hand, it was an anxious construction, not entirely certain as to what place the new social movements occupied in France. Hence there was a defensive quality to the anthropological turn, and its thinkers tended to adopt models of epistemological closure to preserve a sense of intellectual security: Debray's concept of the nation; Todd's family structures; Gauchet's Judeo-Christian history of secularization; and de Benoist's Indo-European folkways. As a result, immigrants and women were often excluded from these frameworks. In this respect, decolonization and the new social movements operated as a negative shaping influence on the anthropological turn, a threat to be conjured away in the realm of theory.

This was most obvious in the case of de Benoist, who was radicalized by the Algerian war and who developed his political anthropology as a negation of the non-‘European’ other. At the center of his work was a racialized white internationalism that made sense only in response to the uprising of the Third World, and the emergence of ‘pan’-identity movements. In Gauchet's work, the bias against Islam was evident as early as *The Disenchantment of the World* (1985), where he proclaimed Christianity to be the religion that allows one to “exit from religion.” Islam, by contrast, lacks the same dynamic institutional structures, and “does not go beyond doctrinal content.”⁶⁴ As such, it could be characterized as a religion of submission, unsuited to enter

⁶⁴ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 74.

modernity. In Todd's work we find a more thorough treatment of race and immigration, especially in the later texts, where Todd likes to point out the reflexive prejudices of French elites. Thus, what I find interesting about these thinkers is precisely that they did not ignore the politics of race and immigration, but found ways to engage (or dismiss) them within the bounds of their political-anthropological systems.

On the question of the gender politics of the four thinkers, I think Sanos is right to say that these could have been explored in greater depth. While the book gives passing attention to debates around, for example, the veil and same-sex marriage, gender is largely absent from the original framing of the anthropological turn. I like Sanos's suggestion that the Durkheimian affinities of the quartet's work—leading them to adopt “atomization” and “social fragmentation” as key categories of analysis—presented an opportunity to discuss how their visions of social cohesion were gendered in the first instance.⁶⁵ There was much evidence already pointing in this direction: none of the four thinkers were favorably disposed to 1968 (Debray and Gauchet attacking it in vitriolic terms);⁶⁶ Gauchet and Todd at various points blamed feminism for contributing to social atomization;⁶⁷ and de Benoist's cherished Indo-European folkways were but a hyper-masculine warrior ethos by another name. Bringing gender into the original matrix of the anthropological turn would have strengthened my account of the paradigm.

This brings me back to Sanos's questions regarding the neo-republican affinities of the four thinkers' work. While I understand why one would make this argument, I do not think it entirely holds up. The political spectrum was dissolving by the 1990s, a function of the *Parti Socialiste's* transformation into a pro-business neoliberal party, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which removed the main ideological counterweight to capitalism, and made neoliberalism a hegemonic project in France. In this period, the four thinkers all mobilized their political-anthropological systems in protest of the neoliberal consensus, and decried the atomizing drift of French society. Thus, their politics did appear to converge around social questions in the early 1990s.

But it was only Todd and Debray who identified as ‘neo-republicans.’ To their way of thinking, the liberalization of France could not be separated from the geopolitical dynamics of the post-Cold War world. The expansion of NATO in the 1990s, and the creation of the European Union served, in their view, to break down barriers for the free flow of capital and exacerbate already-rising social inequalities. What this necessitated was not only a critique of social *anomie*, but a defense of the nation as a site of resistance to globalization. This component is missing from the thought of both de Benoist and Gauchet. De Benoist, it is true, has consistently been a Euroskeptic and an anti-capitalist, but in the name of an ultra-reactionary political project. He would refuse any insinuation of French republicanism or nationalism, which are anathema to his worldview. Gauchet, for his part, has occasionally been critical of capitalism, but it is only to highlight a deeper tendency toward individualism and *anomie* in European life. Capitalism contributes to “the loss of common-purpose,”⁶⁸ but does not cause it. Unlike Debray and Todd, Gauchet has largely been a champion of the EU and has cheered on France's membership in the Atlantic Alliance.

Hence I think there are good reasons not to place all of these thinkers under the heading of ‘neo-republicanism.’ It does not correspond to their own self-understanding as intellectuals, and perhaps more

⁶⁵ Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ See Régis Debray, *Modeste contribution aux discours et cérémonies officielles du dixième anniversaire* (Paris: Maspero, 1978), and Marcel Gauchet, “Avant-propos,” *La Démocratie contre elle-même* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

⁶⁷ See Marcel Gauchet, “Essai de psychologie contemporaine, I,” in *La Démocratie contre elle-même*, and Emmanuel Todd, *Où en sont-elles? Une esquisse de l'histoire des femmes* (Paris: Seuil, 2022).

⁶⁸ See Gauchet's *L'Avenement de la démocratie*, volumes three and four: *À l'épreuve des totalitarismes, 1914-1974* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010) and *Le Nouveau monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017). On Gauchet's work as a unified project, see Natalie J. Doyle, *Marcel Gauchet and the Loss of Common Purpose: Imaginary Islam and the Crisis of European Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

importantly, it overlooks real political differences between them. We might also ask ourselves what we have to gain by making the neo-republican category so broad? What alternative political designations and classifications should we start using if these four thinkers occupy a similar place on the spectrum?

In terms of judging the individual thinkers, I decided, as a point of method, to avoid commenting directly on their ideas, and to practice a form of criticism that would immerse the reader in each thinker's work (more on this below). One of the merits of intellectual history is to provide a more patient and nuanced account of ideas than one typically finds in journalistic treatments. A case in point is the 2014 boycott of Gauchet's appearance at the "Rendez-vous with History" conference at Blois (where he was invited as keynote speaker on the theme of "rebels"). While there may have been good political reasons to wage this campaign, the intellectual case made by Édouard Louis and Ludivine Bantigny—two writers I admire—is somewhat flimsy. Ideas are cherry picked from different texts and slapped together with little regard for intention or context. As a result, the polemics miss their mark and say little that is insightful about his work.⁶⁹ Gauchet believes that the exit from religion leads to the hollowing out of all social forms, so it makes sense that he would regret the decline of a traditional institution like the family. Thus, I will agree with Sanos that Gauchet is a "reactionary," since he has shown a tendency to resist social change. But I do not see any contradiction in calling him a "centrist" too. His politics are admittedly slippery: members of the young Left present him as an arch-conservative; he thinks of himself as a socialist;⁷⁰ but the best indication of his politics is the journal he edited for forty years, *Le Débat*, the voice of an urbane yet politically cautious bourgeoisie—hence a centrist. While my book attempts to identify overlapping themes in the work of these thinkers, I would not want to minimize the political differences between them. Gauchet is not a reactionary in the same sense as figures like de Benoist and Éric Zemmour.

Debray is another matter. Over a career that now spans seven decades, he has never broken with the Left, and has maintained a steadfast commitment to internationalist and anti-imperial politics. He supported Latin American revolutionary movements in the 1960s and 1970s; opposed the expansion of NATO and NATO-led wars, first in the Balkans, for which he was subjected to a relentless criticism in the French media, and then in Afghanistan and Libya. He has been a leading critic of the US's wars in Iraq; France's twenty-first century wars in Sub-Saharan Africa; and he has condemned Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and called for them to be removed.⁷¹ In the present moment, he casts a weary eye on NATO's prevarications in the Ukraine-Russia conflict.⁷² Debray's theoretical work is unique in the world of French ideas, combining cultural criticism—reminiscent of the Frankfurt School—with an elegiac and militant French republicanism—oriented around political symbols and rituals. Walter Benjamin and Charles de Gaulle are among his heroes; and his work features strong currents of both cultural pessimism and revolutionary nostalgia.

His obsession with the bourgeoisie's resilience and cunning has generated some of France's most acerbic commentary,⁷³ but it has also led Debray to overlook the importance of social movements. These for him are typically a means for high-achieving bourgeois youth to advance their careers, but of course this misses the way movements can generate new demands and structures of feeling. When Debray writes about the George Floyd protests, he focuses not on their combustible, even revolutionary quality in the US, but on the insincere ways in which progressive types in France aligned with the cause.⁷⁴ In this sense, Debray's pessimism can

⁶⁹ Ludivine Bantigny and Julien Théry-Astruc, "Marcel Gauchet ou le consensus conservateur: Enquête sur un intellectuel de pouvoir," *Revue de Crieur* 1, 1 (2015): 4-19.

⁷⁰ Marcel Gauchet, "Je suis et je reste fondamentalement socialiste," *Le Monde* (March 10, 2016).

⁷¹ Régis Debray, "Macron's Wars," *Sidecar* (March 24, 2021); Régis Debray, "Pour une cure de vérité au Proche-Orient," *Le Monde diplomatique* (August 2007), reprinted in *Un Candide en Terre sainte* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

⁷² Régis Debray, *Des Musées aux missiles* (Paris: Gallimard, Tractes en lignes, 2022).

⁷³ A few examples: Régis Debray, *L'Edit de Caracalla ou plaidoyer pour les Etats-Unis d'occident* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); *Le Plan vermeil: Modeste Proposition* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); *Supplique aux nouveaux progressistes du XXI^e siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006).

⁷⁴ Régis Debray, *Alignez-vous!* (Paris: Gallimard, Tractes en ligne, 2020).

seem retrograde and cynical. His anti-feminism is of a more deep-seated and troubling nature. In an interview for his book, *Le Moment fraternité*, he was asked about the gendered implications of the concept and replied “Yes, fraternity is virile because the fraternity I’m talking about is that of the combatant. That’s how it has been, that’s how it is. Up till now—but this is the process of changing—women do not fight in wars. The word sorority was invented after 1968 in the feminist movement, and it disappeared ten years after.”⁷⁵ There has been a reluctance to take feminist struggle seriously in his work and a tendency to masculinize the language and imagery of the Republic, and for this Debray must be criticized.

Now I come to the larger political-intellectual framing of the book. Here Knox Peden takes issue with two of my main contentions: first, that the anthropological turn resembles what Marx and Engels called the “holy family,” a way of thinking that sees itself as critical but in fact traffics in abstractions and mystifications; second, that the anthropological turn is symptomatic of the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Why bother, he asks, to reconstruct their ideas in such detail if, in the end, they are reduced to mere symptoms and mystifications? Are there, moreover, non-mystified ways of looking at the world, and if so, what are they? In response to these questions, I would say first that I chose to write about these four thinkers because I find their ideas to be interesting and worthy of discussion in their own right. Second, I think their work collectively expresses something interesting about the state of French culture and society after 1968. In this respect, the thinkers are being used as emblems of larger trends and tendencies in the world of French ideas. They are not, however, merely stand-ins, since in my argument, they helped shape the discursive milieu that they are supposed to represent. So while their ideas may be “mystifying” and “spectral” to some degree, they have been received as “real” in France, and have affected developments in French political and social discourse.

One of the challenges in writing this book was, as Peden, suggests, to refrain from commenting on the ideas as I reconstructed them. My hope was that the tensions, biases, and contradictions would emerge organically through the description of their thought. Thus, Peden can pay me no higher compliment than to say my presentation of the ideas allows readers to “see what is problematic in them.”⁷⁶ Still, I felt compelled to offer a general pronouncement at the end of the book. With the “holy family” comparison, the point was not to dismiss the work of the four thinkers as mere symptoms, but to cast a broader judgment on the state of French ideas. If, as I have argued, these thinkers are broadly indicative of French political discourse, then the latter shares some of the turn’s limitations and impasses: the tendency, for example, to reduce conflict and difference to anthropological markers; and the failure to interrogate institutions thought to be foundational to French identity (nation, state, family). Even if I find the thinkers of the turn to be deficient in various ways, I think these deficiencies help us understand French political culture today. Something can be wrong and important at the same time.

Peden is correct to say that my judgment suggests that other discursive frameworks are possible and preferable. For me, these would involve close attention to the material logic and history of social institutions: who benefits from these arrangements? Why has the given institution been constituted in this particular way? What interests does it serve? How can it be changed? These questions are not answered to my satisfaction by the four thinkers because they tend to eternalize and reify their concepts (and block us from grasping them properly). While this might be seen as a dogmatic assertion of methodology, everyone chooses a framework that corresponds to their way of looking at the world. The alternative position—that all we can know are symptoms—is depressing and nihilistic. Thus, to Peden’s point, I would rather die by ideology critique than concede to the defeatism of ‘everything a symptom.’

⁷⁵ Régis Debray et al., “Conférence—rencontre avec Régis Debray, écrivain, philosophe, autour de son livre *Le Moment fraternité*,” *Bulletin de psychologie* 506 (2010), 44.

⁷⁶ On method, the essay to which I frequently return is Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

As for the relationship to neoliberalism, this was not posed in a strict or reductive way. It would be misleading to argue that the four thinkers are emblematic of neoliberalism when they have often been trenchant critics of it. Rather, my claim is that the same social dislocations that produced the anthropological turn were the beginnings of neoliberalism in France. I try to think about this relationship in a dialectical way. On the one hand, the thinkers worked within a set of political and social forces that we now recognize as ‘neoliberal,’ and that can be defined broadly as the hollowing out of the social and the intrusion of the market into all aspects of life. Their theorizations developed as a direct response to these dynamics. On the other hand, the thinkers drew from ideas and frameworks that preexisted the neoliberal era, and generated theoretical analyses that transformed how neoliberalism was understood in France. They were part of this world, not just a symptom of it. A similar point could be made regarding the concept of “culturalization” (35) I use in the introduction. I am not making the nostalgic claim that there was once a better time when class solidarities were organized purely on an economic basis, but then culture and ‘identity politics’ arrived on the scene and ruined everything. Rather, my argument is that political theorists in France came to recognize that social struggle is always filtered through a cultural lens, which is why they tended to privilege the sacred, the symbolic, and kinship structures. They would thus agree, I think, with the example Peden raises from the work of François Furet (who, after all, was a mentor to Gauchet). To be sure, their understanding of culture had its own biases and limitations: It is on these grounds that one should object to their views, and not that they were theorists of culture *tout court*.

Sanos raises a number of important questions regarding the genre of intellectual history being done in *The Anthropological Turn*. She argues that the book’s biographical method of organization is not always ideal, since it tends to privilege the unity and coherence of an author’s work. As a result, contextual elements recede into the background, and moments of exchange, debate, and contestation are passed over. I was all too conscious of these limitations as I wrote the book, and found it particularly difficult to incorporate cross-author discussion within the biographical format. Giving more space to Debray and Gauchet’s disagreement over religion, or de Benoist’s reading of Debray’s *Critique de la raison politique* would have added intellectual depth to the project. The task, moreover, of reading each thinker’s work exhaustively was a little punishing. Each summer I would arrive at the Gibert bookstore in Paris, and my heart would sink as I noticed three new books on the display table by Debray alone. Nevertheless, I chose to organize the chapters in this fashion because I felt that the work of the four thinkers had only been studied in a glancing way, and merited more systematic attention. The slapdash treatment of their ideas can be explained in part by the territory they inhabit as ‘public’ intellectuals: since their texts are seen to lack the depth and sophistication of thinkers like Jacques Derrida or Michel Foucault, they can be referred to casually, and dismissed or taken up as one likes. In practice, this means that their ideas and positions become indistinct and easily conflated. If Todd, Debray, and de Benoist opposed the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s, they did not do so for the same reasons. To focus only on their agreement without acknowledging their larger political goals risks obscuring the deeper terms of conflict and alignment of positions.

In organizing the book as a collective intellectual biography, I hoped to strike my own balance of text and context. Where I think intellectual biography is useful is in understanding how ideas work on a phenomenological level. Thinkers develop a way of looking at the world that inevitably affects how they interpret events and respond to controversies. While it is true that the worldview is not fixed and stable, and may itself have been forged amid debate and controversy, thinkers are typically applying already-existing positions and frameworks onto the intellectual discourse. Engaging in polemics is usually an act of accommodation for a thinker, though it does sometimes happen that external events, which constantly pressurize and tax the system, shatter their outlook and reorient their position in fundamental ways. Thus, as I see it, the intellectual-historical operation is to track how the accommodation functions in practice: where are the inconsistencies, elisions, and contradictions? How does the author remain faithful to their intellectual and political foundations while sizing up the political balance of forces and staking out a position? I hoped that this methodology could combine close and exhaustive reading of a thinker’s *oeuvre*—essentially, a hermeneutic approach—with an account of the controversies that engaged and challenged their thinking.

This optic is especially well suited for a highly schematic writer like Todd, whose positions always refer back to the family structures he adopted as an analytic grid in the late 1970s. One of his early maps showed that France was uniquely diverse in having three different kinds of family structures that balanced out one another.⁷⁷ However, the family type that predominated in the Maghreb was not represented in that schema. This became a problem for Todd down the line, not only because his politics took a more radical turn in the 1990s, but also because ideologues of the far-Right, namely Zemmour, could point to the original maps as “evidence” that immigrant families were deeply foreign to France and interfered with its ideal demographic configuration.⁷⁸ Todd devoted a series of works to immigration and the family structures of the Middle East and North Africa, where he attempted to revise his original views within the terms of his initial framework.⁷⁹ Only within the biographical format can the intellectual historian appreciate how this act of accommodation was performed, and how it responded to a given set of political imperatives. It seems to me that ideas of any complexity are best studied through a close reading of the individual writer’s texts, which are inseparable from but not reducible to their social contexts.

⁷⁷ Hervé Le Bras and Emmanuel Todd, *L’invention de la France: atlas anthropologique et politique* (Paris: Librarie Générale Française, 1981).

⁷⁸ Éric Zemmour, “Todd le chercheur et Emmanuel le militant,” *Le Figaro* (January 22, 2020).

⁷⁹ Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd, *Le Rendez-vous des civilisations* (Paris: La République des idées, 2007); Emmanuel Todd, *Allah n’y est pour rien: sur les révolutions arabes et quelques autres* (Paris: Le Publieur, 2011).