Bertrand de Jouvenel
and the Revolt Against the State
in Post-War America

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ABSTRACT. This paper focuses on the reception of Bertrand de Jouvenel’s *Du Pouvoir* in post-war America. I show how Jouvenel drew on a firmly established tradition of ‘aristocratic liberalism’ in French political thought, which in turn allowed him to develop a pessimistic outlook on modern Western political culture as inherently conducive to totalitarianism. This profound pessimism allowed *Du Pouvoir*, which fell relatively flat in France itself, to become a critical success in the Anglophone world. Jouvenel’s jeremiad resonated in particular with Cold War warriors such as Friedrich Hayek.

KEYWORDS. Bertrand de Jouvenel, liberalism, conservatism, Cold War, anti-communism, totalitarianism

I. INTRODUCTION

French journalist, political thinker and economist Bertrand de Jouvenel published over thirty books and many more articles in the course of his long life.¹ Today, he is mainly remembered as the author of *Du Pouvoir: Histoire naturelle de sa croissance*. Composed in the wake of the Battle of Stalingrad and published in 1945, *Du Pouvoir* was first and foremost a product of the Second World War. How did one explain a war that had ‘surpassed in savagery and destructive force any yet seen by the Western World’? This was the goal Jouvenel set himself in his introduction. More specifically, how did one explain the war’s all-encompassing nature, the fact that “everyone – workmen, peasants and women alike – are in the fight, and in consequence everything, the factory, the harvest, even the dwellinghouse, has turned target” (Jouvenel 1948, 15)? But if the
questions addressed by Jouvenel were highly topical, *Du Pouvoir* itself had little to say about the events its author had just lived through. Jouvenel believed that the real causes of Europe’s dramatic conflagration long preceded the twentieth century and Hitler’s rise to power. They had to be sought in the creation of the modern, post-medieval state itself.

By framing his inquiry in this particular way, I will argue, Jouvenel reached back to a typically French intellectual tradition that I have elsewhere described as ‘aristocratic liberalism’ (De Dijn 2008). Aristocratic liberalism drew its inspiration from Montesquieu’s eighteenth-century masterpiece *De l’Esprit des lois*, but its contours became more clearly fixed in the writings of nineteenth-century liberals such as Alexis de Tocqueville. Aristocratic liberals believed that a strong nobility was indispensable for the maintenance of liberty. Wealthy, independent noblemen, such as the English Lords, acted as a ‘check’ on central government. Without such a check, state power would become centralized and tyrannical. Nineteenth-century aristocratic liberals believed that French history clearly illustrated this point. Had not the rise of the Third Estate gone hand in hand with the growth of absolutism? Had not the French Revolution, with its egalitarian ideals, resulted in the most terrible despotism? These reflections made aristocratic liberals deeply pessimistic about the prospects for liberty in France, a pessimism that became ever more outspoken in the course of the nineteenth century, as the French state floundered from one revolution to another. As we shall see, *Du Pouvoir* drew heavily on this typically French intellectual tradition in its analysis of the expansion of modern state power.

I will also demonstrate that Jouvenel adapted this intellectual tradition in important ways to the new intellectual context in which he was writing. These adaptations, I will argue, allowed *Du Pouvoir*, which fell relatively flat in France itself, to become a critical success in the Anglophone world. *Du Pouvoir* gained the enthusiastic endorsement of Cold War warriors such as Friedrich Hayek. Its success propelled Jouvenel to become one of the founding members of the influential Mont Pelerin
Society, together with staunch anti-communists such as Milton Friedman, Ludwig von Mises and of course Hayek himself. In this way, Jouvenel gained a new audience for the tenets of aristocratic liberalism; an audience that would, in turn, contribute in important ways to the ‘revolt against government’ within the Reaganite Republican party in the United States and Thatcher’s Conservatives in Britain.

II. JOUVENEL ON POWER

Jouvenel’s postwar fame as a staunchly anti-totalitarian, liberal thinker is somewhat surprising when viewed from the perspective of his earlier intellectual development. Like many of his contemporaries, he succumbed to the lure of the anti-democratic tendencies of the interwar period. After participating unsuccessfully in the elections of 1928 as a candidate for the left-wing Parti Radical, Jouvenel drifted steadily to the right. This became clear at first in his journalistic work (he wrote contributions for major newspapers such as Paris-Soir.) As an eager proponent of Franco-German rapprochement, he gained a reputation as a Germanophile intellectual and he became a close friend of Otto Abetz, a prominent Nazi who worked for Joachim von Ribbentrop. Through his friendship with Abetz, Jouvenel managed to obtain an interview with Adolf Hitler in 1936 – which was seen, at the time, as a spectacular coup. The German leader succeeded in charming Jouvenel and also managed to convince his interlocutor that the Germans did not wish for war with the French, a statement that was proven false in the dramatic German invasion of the Rhineland, only a few days after the publication of Jouvenel’s interview.

Jouvenel’s fascination with the anti-democratic right eventually brought him to the Parti Populaire Français (PPF). In 1933, he had made the acquaintance of Jacques Doriot, a former communist and mayor of Saint-Denis, who ended up converting to fascism. When Doriot founded the PPF in 1936, Jouvenel became a member and before long he was seen...
as one of its leading intellectuals. Jouvenel did not hesitate to put his journalistic skills at the service of the PPF. He became the editor-in-chief of *L’Emancipation nationale*, the PPF’s party journal. In this capacity, Jouvenel agitated against the *Front Populaire*, an alliance of left-wing parties that had won the elections of 1936. More importantly, he became an increasingly outspoken critic of parliamentary and democratic institutions.

In 1938, Jouvenel participated for a second time in the elections, this time as a candidate for the PPF, but he was defeated anew. Increasingly dissatisfied with Doriot’s leadership, Jouvenel resigned from the PPF in 1938. But it was to take the French defeat of 1940 before he finally distanced himself emotionally and intellectually from his earlier fascist sympathies.

Unlike many of his former friends and political collaborators, such as Doriot and Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Jouvenel refused to collaborate with the German occupier or with the Vichy Régime. Having kept in touch with his former friends, however, he was able to pass on snippets of information he obtained from them to the *Services de Renseignement*, which had been organized to gather data on occupied France on behalf of the Allied Forces. In 1943, Jouvenel was held for questioning by the Germans in relation to these activities. Feeling that he would endanger himself and his young family (Jouvenel had just married Hélène Duseigneur) by staying in France, he fled to Switzerland, where he settled in the canton of Neuchâtel. Confronted with the relative isolation of life in neutral Switzerland, Jouvenel used his spare time to research and write an extensive treatise about the role of state power in the history of the West. *Du Pouvoir: Histoire naturelle de sa croissance* was published by the Swiss publisher Le Cheval Ailé in 1945.

*Du Pouvoir’s* indebtedness to Jouvenel’s French eighteenth and especially nineteenth century predecessors is unmistakable. On the very first pages of his book, for instance, he quotes from Hippolyte Taine, Benjamin Constant and (twice) Montesquieu’s *De l’Esprit des lois*. This predilection
was not the result of intellectual parochialism. Jouvenel was fluent in English and well-versed in German intellectual debates. He quoted extensively from Marx, Lenin and Engels, and, as appears from his footnotes, he was also familiar with the work of contemporary social scientists and jurists such as the Russian Mosei Ostrogorski and the British A.V. Dicey. Rather, his extensive reliance on thinkers such as Montesquieu, Tocqueville and Taine indicates that Jouvenel located himself in a specific tradition of French political thought – a tradition that drew upon Montesquieu’s *De l’Esprit des lois* and that took the idea that political liberty required the existence of aristocratic ‘intermediary bodies’ as its point of departure.4

Jouvenel acknowledged his allegiance to this particular intellectual tradition quite explicitly in the final chapters of *Du Pouvoir*, in which he draws the attention of his readers to the ‘solutions found in past times’ for the problem of the expansion of modern state power, giving pride of place to Montesquieu and his nineteenth-century followers (Jouvenel 1948, 241). Jouvenel credits Montesquieu for being the first to understand the need to limit power through intermediary bodies or ‘makeweights’ (as Jouvenel’s American translator put it). Unlike more traditional liberals, Jouvenel did not conclude from Montesquieu’s description of the English constitution that power needed to be divided between a legislative, an executive and a judiciary. A merely formal separation of powers between different branches of the government would not suffice. Instead, the expansion of state power could only be effectively limited by powerful and independent interest groups, which had the wherewithal to resist government when necessary and which would therefore act as a ‘make-weight’ against governmental power. Traditionally, the nobility had been the most appropriate social group capable of fulfilling this role (Jouvenel 1948, 243). Liberty therefore had ‘aristocratic roots’, as chapter 17 of *Du Pouvoir* was titled.

One of the key goals of Jouvenel’s book was to demonstrate how the erosion of these traditional, aristocratic barriers against state power had
ultimately led to the ‘totalitarian democracy’ of his own time. Indeed, the bulk of his book (chapters nine to nineteen) is taken up with a profoundly pessimistic analysis of modern history, which is deeply influenced by Montesquieu’s nineteenth-century heirs Tocqueville and Taine. Like Jouvenel, Tocqueville and Taine had sought the causes for the political upheaval of their own time (Napoleon III’s dictatorship, the Paris Commune) in the past, which had resulted in *L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856) and *Les Origines de la France contemporaine* (1876-1894). Jouvenel, who had carefully read Tocqueville and Taine, expanded upon this analysis by emphasizing its European, rather than French dimension, and by bringing it up to date, ending with the rise of communism and fascism rather than with Napoleon III’s dictatorship.

Like Tocqueville, Jouvenel believed that the causes for the growth of modern state power had to be sought in the Old Regime’s alliance between absolute kings and the common people, an alliance that had subverted the traditional aristocratic barriers against royal power. Quoting copiously from *L’Ancien Régime*, Jouvenel explains how monarchs – not just in France but in many parts of the world – had collaborated with the people against the aristocracy, and how this had facilitated the unprecedented expansion of state power from the twelfth century onwards. In Tocquevillian vein, Jouvenel writes that “the passion for absolutism is, inevitably, in conspiracy with the passion for equality” (1948, 153). By creating a bureaucratic apparatus staffed by commoners, the alliance between the people and the state had only grown stronger: “What a sight it is, this rise of the clerks, this swarming of busy bees who gradually devour the feudal splendor and leave it with nothing but its pomp and titles! Does it not leap to the eye that the State has made the fortunes of all these common people, just as they have made the State’s?” (1948, 157).

In similar Tocquevillian vein, Jouvenel emphasizes that far from creating a rupture with the Old Regime, the revolutions of the modern age exhibit an essential continuity with their absolutist predecessors. The French Revolution, Jouvenel insists, clearly illustrates this point. “Let who
will open the administrative dossiers from the reigns of Louis XIV to that of Napoleon. The continuity of Power will then strike his eye; the obstacles which it encountered and the true direction of events will then stand revealed” (1948, 189). Jouvenel also draws his reader’s attention to another and more recent example of the same truth: the Russian Revolution of 1917, which he saw as a repetition of the Revolution of 1789. “The Russian Revolution offers the same contrast, but still more pronounced, between the Liberty promised and the Authority realized” (1948, 198). This was all the more ironic when we bear in mind that Marx and Engels believed that the state was rooted in evil and wanted to abolish it. But far from abolishing the state, the Russian Revolution had erected a ‘formidable apparatus of restraint.’ Nothing else could have been expected: “In the final analysis Revolutions are made not for man but for Power” (Jouvenel 1948, 200).

But the rise of the bureaucratic-plebeian state apparatus was not the only factor contributing to the growth of state power. Of equal importance, according to Jouvenel, were the cultural developments taking place between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Following Taine, who had placed considerable emphasis on this theme in his work, Jouvenel argued that the demise of traditional barriers against royal power had been accompanied by a ‘mental’ erosion of limits on power. In the Middle Ages, Jouvenel argued, kings had felt their power to be restricted by divine law and by customs. But this had changed in the wake of the ‘rationalist crisis’ of the sixteenth century and the rise of what Jouvenel described as ‘Protagorism’. In his view, there was a clear correlation between the breakdown of traditional beliefs from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and the rise of absolutism in the same period. The enlightened despot was the best example of this correlation.

The rationalist crisis had ultimately given rise to a dangerous new idea: popular sovereignty. Although this idea had been conceived as the foundation of liberty, it paved the way for tyranny. Indeed, the idea of popular sovereignty gave the successors of royal absolutism an even more
unlimited hold over state power than the doctrine of royal absolutism had ever done. As a result, the parliaments of the nineteenth century, with their limited suffrage, had been but a stepping stone on the way to ‘totalitarian democracy’. As the parliamentary body had come to pretend ‘by a daring fiction’ to be ‘the assembled people itself,’ pressure had arisen to turn the parliament into an ever more plebeian institution. The results had been dire. “Men called more and more loudly for the institution of Popular Sovereignty, with its absolutism; in other words, the complex of springs which played the part of shock-absorbers had to be made as simple as possible, and there had to be a concentrated Power, of a sensibility which would make it obsequious to the wishes of a day, and of a strength which could fulfill them.” This process had ended in ‘a new Cesarism’ (Jouvenel 1948, 215-216).

The rise of ‘totalitarian democracy’ in Jouvenel’s own time was merely a continuation of this process (1948, 215-216). This was not simply visible in the Nazi and communist states. The demise of traditional barriers against power and the enthronement of popular sovereignty had even infected liberal political regimes such as the United States. Indeed, a large part of Chapter 14, entitled ‘Totalitarian Democracy’, is taken up with an analysis of the excesses of party ‘machines’ in the United States and in England, and the subversive effects this had for liberty. Jouvenel portrayed American voters as led by emotion, not by reason. Party loyalty, therefore, caused nothing but discord and strife. As Jouvenel warned his readers, the step from the Tammany Hall ‘machine’ to the dictatorship of the single party is but a small one: “The competition of ‘mechanized’ parties ends in the dictatorship of one party – of, in other words, one gang” (1948, 235). Political strife made people wish for stability and “find in the end disgraceful consolation in the peace of despotism” (1948, 237).

Jouvenel ends his book on a profoundly bleak note. Despite the warnings of ‘useless Cassandras’ such as ‘Tocqueville, Comte and Taine and many another’ at the end of the nineteenth century, Western societies now
suffered under a tyranny that was more crushing than any despotism of the Old Regime. Traditional social elites, such as feudal barons, had been replaced by people driven solely by self-interest. The breakdown of the social order had led, with interruptions, from chaos to totalitarianism. It seemed to Jouvenel that the blossoming of Western society was definitely over: “After the firework display, the darkness of a formless mass, destined to despotism and anarchy” (Jouvenel 1948, 315-318).

III. JOUVENEL AS A COLD WAR LIBERAL

_Du Pouvoir_ enjoyed little success when it was published in France in 1945. Positive reviews of Jouvenel’s work appeared mainly in fringe newspapers associated with former collaborationists and fascists. As Jouvenel’s biographer Olivier Dard has shown, the relative lack of critical acclaim for _Du Pouvoir_ had much to do with the association of both its author and publisher, _Le Cheval Ailé_, with pre-war fascism. The most laudatory review of _Du Pouvoir_ appeared in the _Ecrits de Paris_, a journal that served as a literary platform for former collaborators, to which Jouvenel contributed some of his journalistic work of the post-war period.

The reception of _Du Pouvoir_ in the Anglophone world was very different. Even before its translation into English, _Du Pouvoir_ was brought to the attention of an Anglophone audience with a glowing review by Denis William Brogan in the _Times Literary Supplement_ of January 1946. A professor in political science at Cambridge University, Brogan had many connections in the French academic world. He had taught at the lycée in Clermont-Ferrand and had published on Marcel Proust, Proudhon, and the Third Republic. In his long review, Brogan emphasized the ‘Frenchness’ of Jouvenel’s book, explaining that it would be primarily of interest in the context of French reconstruction. Nevertheless, France was not the only country that could profit from Jouvenel’s message. In light of the rise of totalitarianism and the creeping expansion of state power,
Du Pouvoir was relevant “even in countries like England or Switzerland which have escaped the worst effects of absolutist centralization.” As Brogan put it in his conclusion: “For all the movement of the age has been towards the uncritical exaltation of State power. Where to-day are the Pluralists, the guild Socialists, the Anarchists? Reduced to tiny sects or transformed into uncritical acceptors of the saviour State. And nowhere is that transformation more marked than in M. de Jouvenel’s France, the France of Proudhon and of Jaurès. But it is not only in France that the old wariness of the State, and the lesson of not putting unlimited trust in princes or parties, has been forgotten.”

However, it was not until 1948, three years after its original publication, that Jouvenel’s book came to the attention of a larger audience, when J. F. Huntington’s English translation of Du Pouvoir was published by Hutchinson in the United Kingdom and, one year later, by Viking Press in the United States. Interest in the United States was particularly pronounced. In May and June 1949, a flurry of American newspapers, including the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the New Republic and a host of regional newspapers, reviewed Du Pouvoir. Many of these reviews were positive and even Jouvenel’s critics tended to agree on the importance of his book. This brings us to an important question: What explains Du Pouvoir’s transatlantic success? Why this interest in a book that had, after all, much more to say about France in the eighteenth century than about the United States in the 1940s?

In order to answer this question, we need to briefly turn our attention from Jouvenel’s book to an earlier publication, Friedrich Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom (1944). Hayek’s book had famously argued that all forms of central economic planning led to the ‘serfdom’ of which Nazi Germany and the Soviet state were but the starkest examples. In other words, Nazism had ‘socialist roots’. The totalitarian regimes in Germany and the Soviet Union, therefore, were not aberrations brought about by some inherent flaw in the German or Russian character, but the result of a widespread trend towards socialism (by which Hayek meant economic
planning) in the West as a whole. Constant vigilance was thus necessary, lest all democracies in the West travel the road to serfdom. Hayek drove this point home in a chapter entitled ‘Totalitarians in our midst’ (Hayek 2007).

The American edition of Hayek’s book was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1944 with a run of two thousand copies. By the time the English translation of *Du Pouvoir* appeared, however, Hayek’s book had become a bestseller. A condensed version of *The Road to Serfdom* appeared in *Reader’s Digest* in 1945, and when Hayek arrived in the United States in the same year for a five-week lecture tour, he had become a phenomenon. A lecture sponsored by the Town Hall Club in New York, drew an overflow crowd of more than three thousand listeners, and was broadcast over the radio. But Hayek did not just draw adulating crowds. His book was also met with fierce criticism from left-leaning journalists and intellectuals, who saw his message as an attack on New Deal policies. In other words, *The Road to Serfdom* had become a profoundly polarizing work in the post-war United States (Hayek 2007, 1-22).

Jouvenel did not refer to Hayek in *Du Pouvoir* and probably had not read *The Road to Serfdom* prior to 1945. Nevertheless, his book was seen by the American press as another instalment of ‘Hayekism’. This identification of Jouvenel’s message with that of Hayek’s was by no means implausible. Like Hayek, Jouvenel portrayed fascism, Nazism and especially communism not as aberrations but as extreme manifestations of a more widespread trend towards the expansion of state power in the West. And like Hayek, Jouvenel’s book, particularly Chapter 14 on ‘Totalitarian Democracy’, allowed its readers to conclude that totalitarianism posed a threat to all Western societies, not just to the Germans, Italians or Russians, thus turning attention to the enemy within.

The link between Hayek’s message and Jouvenel’s was underscored by the fact that Hayek himself hailed the English translation of *Du Pouvoir* in an enthusiastic review in *Time and Tide* as a ‘great book’ and ‘a monumental study’, explaining that it provided a “masterly and frightening
picture of the impersonal mechanisms by which power tends to expand until it engulfs the whole of society” (1992, 251). Hayek particularly lauded Jouvenel for having punctured the ‘fateful delusion’ that a democratic state needed no barriers against power. He agreed that democracies were far more prone to despotism than regimes ruled by an elite. “Indeed, there is reason to fear that unlimited power in the hands of the people will grow farther and be even more pernicious in its effects than power exercised by few” (1992, 249). In addition, he praised Jouvenel’s book for its critique of ‘utopian’ political thought. Hayek commended Jouvenel for “his distrust of that facile rationalism which would rather force facts into a simple scheme that our limited reason can fully comprehend then ever admit that reason itself may teach us the limits of its power. Indeed, he rightly puts much of the blame for the threatening doom on this intellectualist bias” (1992, 250).

When comparing Jouvenel’s book with *The Road to Serfdom*, however, differences between both works are as striking as resemblances. Jouvenel’s conclusions – influenced as they were by the aristocratic-liberal reaction against the French Revolution – are in many respects more far-reaching than Hayek’s. Whereas Hayek had focused on the threat posed by socialism and central planning, Jouvenel’s book indicts modern democracy in and of itself as leading to totalitarianism. As we have seen, Jouvenel’s term ‘totalitarian democracy’ did not just imply Nazism or communism. Jouvenel even saw the totalitarian threat rear its ugly head in essential features of liberal democracies such as party politics. Second, Jouvenel’s book is much more conservative – in a very literal sense of the word – than Hayek’s. By depicting the growth of state power as inextricably linked to modern developments such as the levelling of society and the transition from royal to popular sovereignty, Jouvenel’s anti-statism is unabashedly backward looking. His political ideal – sovereignty limited by traditional elites – is located firmly in the past. Jouvenel leaves his readers in no doubt that to preach against the growth of state power is to go against the grain of time.
Hayek – who famously always resisted the label ‘conservative’ – gently chided Jouvenel precisely for these reactionary tendencies. In the conclusion of his review, he points out that Jouvenel in the end adopted a “more conservative position than is in accord with his ardent love of liberty and which makes him regard even more of the political evils of this world as inevitable than may be necessary” (1992, 252). But Hayek was not entirely unsympathetic to Jouvenel’s bleak view of modernity: “But, it must be confessed, I know not the student of power who has not been driven to similarly pessimistic conclusions” (1992, 252). As we have seen, moreover, he was fully in agreement with Jouvenel’s anti-populist and anti-democratic musings. Indeed, Hayek particularly recommended Jouvenel’s Chapter 13, ‘Imperium and Democracy’ to the readers of *Time and Tide*, a chapter in which Jouvenel depicted the nineteenth century struggle for universal suffrage as a step on the road to totalitarianism.

*Du Pouvoir’s* conservative traits did nothing to dampen the interest of the anti-communist right in the United States. Jouvenel’s book was received with an enthusiasm bordering on the adulatory by the same commentators who had already embraced Hayek’s book with such fervour. In a fairly typical review published in the *Wall Street Journal*, the anti-communist journalist William Henry Chamberlin exulted *Du Pouvoir* as the product of “a typically French combination of brilliance, lucidity and erudition.” He described Jouvenel’s book as “one of the most serious and searching analyses of statism that has been published in modern times” and wrote of “passages worthy of Burke and De Tocqueville” (Chamberlin 1949).

The Hayekian message of *Du Pouvoir* was not lost on Chamberlin. As he pointed out in his review, ‘statism’ had grown stronger all over the world, despite all attempts made by the United States to stop this from happening. Jouvenel’s book helped to explain why this had happened. “America fought its first crusade to make the world safe for democracy as against the plumed uniformed monarchy of Kaiser Wilhelm II. But after the hydra head represented by the old German empire had been cut off not two but three appeared, in its place, communism, Nazism and
fascism. A second crusade, waged against Nazis, fascists and Japanese militarists, led to a notable strengthening of communism in East Europe and to a substantial growth of statism in countries which still maintain free institutions.” Moreover, Du Pouvoir’s message helped to grasp why the struggle against totalitarian regimes threatened liberty in the United States itself: “The problem of resisting totalitarian aggression without becoming totalitarian is so real and serious that the author’s comment is very timely and topical” (Chamberlin 1949).

But Hayekian warnings against the enemy within were not the only aspects of Jouvenel’s work that appealed to Chamberlin. Like Hayek, Chamberlin was also persuaded by Jouvenel’s critical attitude towards populist movements. He extensively quoted Jouvenel on the dangers of popular sovereignty and wholeheartedly agreed that “a mob can be as tyrannical and destructive as an absolute ruler.” Indeed, in Chamberlin’s view, mob rule would automatically lead to the dictatorship of one party: “The most tyrannical of all forms of government is really the temporary mood of a mob, frozen into a pattern and preserved by the rule of a single party.” And again like Hayek, Chamberlin also commended Jouvenel for his critical attitude towards utopian thought, drawing his readers’ attention to Jouvenel’s disparaging remarks about More’s Utopia or Plato’s Republic (Chamberlin 1949).

In the late 1940s and 1950s, the ties between Jouvenel and the Hayekian right became ever closer. Jouvenel had made Hayek’s acquaintance in 1945, and the Austrian economist invited Jouvenel to become one of the founding members of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947, together with other lions of the anti-communist movement such as Ludwig von Mises and Milton Friedman. Jouvenel remained active in the society for the next ten years, and occupied a privileged position as Hayek’s adviser on all things French.13

New publications further enhanced Jouvenel’s reputation. In 1949 he was invited by Cambridge’s Corpus Christi College to give the Boutwood Lectures, which were edited as The Ethics of Redistribution by Cambridge
University Press in 1951. In his lectures, Jouvenel took a clear stand against the expansion of the welfare state, partly on the ground that the redistribution of income would lead to an increase of state power rather than to greater social equality. From the preface to the printed edition, it becomes clear again to what extent Jouvenel had become integrated into the anti-communist mainstream of the post-war years: he thanked ‘generous friends’ such as Milton Friedman and Willmoore Kendall for reading the proofs (Jouvenel 1951, ix).

In 1955, Jouvenel published De la Souveraineté: A la recherché du bien politique, which was translated into English and published in 1957 by Chicago University Press (Jouvenel 1957). Advertised as a sequel to Du Pouvoir, De la Souveraineté provided a more theoretical and abstract inquiry into a number of political terms such as justice and the common good, but in essence Jouvenel’s views remained the same as in 1945. Again, Jouvenel railed against the theory of the sovereignty of the people, which was “but a new version of the theories of despotism advanced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the profit of the Stuarts and the Bourbons” (1957, 199). De la Souveraineté still appealed to the American audience that had lapped up Du Pouvoir, as is evident from the ‘fan letter’ that Jouvenel received after its publication from Irving Kristol, an American anti-communist who was later to play an important role in the neo-conservative movement.14

IV. Conclusion

In the 1940s and 1950s, Jouvenel thus found a new audience for the anti-statist message of aristocratic liberalism among the American right.15 But his influence did not prove to be lasting. Indeed, Jouvenel’s sudden rise to fame was followed by a slow eclipse in the 1960s and 1970s. After the publication of De la souveraineté, he faded into obscurity in the United States. L’Art de la conjuncture, published in 1964 and translated into English
and published by Irving Kristol’s Basic Books in 1967, was more or less ignored. It was the last book of Jouvenel’s to be translated into English during his lifetime. Even today, contemporary scholarly interest in Jouvenel remains relatively scarce, when compared with the cottage industry that has sprung up around Hayek. One of the more recent books on Jouvenel’s life and work, while confident that Jouvenel will be read long after Sartre, Bourdieu and Foucault have been forgotten, nevertheless presents itself explicitly as ‘an act of intellectual recovery’ (Mahoney 2005, vii).

Jouvenel’s declining influence can be attributed to different factors. The unpredictability of his intellectual course was probably off-putting to his more ideological followers. In the 1960s and 1970s, Jouvenel reinvented himself as one of the founding fathers of ‘political ecology’. Sympathetic to the student revolts of the late 1960s, he migrated towards more left-wing political views. His critical attitude towards the war in Vietnam also made him far less sympathetic to the United States, a power he had always professed to admire. In addition, Jouvenel’s interwar association with the PPF caught up with him in a spectacular way. In 1983, his interwar activities were discussed in Zeev Sternhell’s book *Ni droite ni gauche*, in which Jouvenel was presented as an outright fascist. Jouvenel decided to press charges against Sternhell and after calling many witnesses and proving that he had not collaborated with the German occupiers (as Sternhell had claimed), he was awarded a symbolic franc in damages. Nevertheless, the trial drew attention to Jouvenel’s membership of the PPF and his sympathy for the fascist cause. This severely damaged his reputation at a time when anti-statism was gathering force again in the United States and in Europe.

As a result, Jouvenel had less of a direct impact on the revival of anti-statism in the 1980s than contemporaries such as Hayek. Nevertheless, his contribution to the development of a coherently anti-statist ideology in the immediate post-war period is important for several reasons. First, it allows us to understand that the ‘revolt against the state’ drew not
only upon Anglo-American or Central European sources. Indeed, the
typically French tradition of aristocratic liberalism, and especially the pes-
simistic outlook it promoted on the modern state, proved very congenial
to the anti-state mood in the immediate aftermath of the war (a point also
illustrated by the frequent invocations of Tocqueville’s authority by Hayek
and others). Second, the reception of Jouvenel’s book allows us to under-
stand just how conservative or even reactionary this movement had
become. In its Jouvenellian tenor, anti-statism was undeniably backward
looking, and proudly thought of itself as going against the grain of mod-
ern society. There can be little wonder that the adherents of the revolt
against the state on both sides of the Atlantic ended up in self-styled
‘conservative’ parties.

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5. On Tocqueville and Taine as exponents of aristocratic liberalism, see de Dijn 2008, Chapter 6 and Epilogue.


8. Ibid., 247.

9. Ibid., 244.

10. According to Dard, Jouvenel met Hayek in 1945. Ibid., 280.


15. It should be noted that Hayek and Jouvenel were not the only continental thinkers recuperated by the American right in this period. In a brilliant article, Lionel Gossman has shown how the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt was turned into a Cold War liberal, this despite (or perhaps because of?) his anti-democratic leanings. The parallels between the reception of Burckhardt and Jouvenel are remarkable. See: Lionel Gossman, “Jacob Burckhardt: Cold War Liberal?” *The Journal of Modern History* 74 (2002): 538–572.


17. Ibid., 368-374.

18. Ibid., 374-379.