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Daniel J. Mahoney. *De Gaulle: Statesmanship, Grandeur and Modern Democracy.* Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996. xiii + 188 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-94922-8.

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Charles de Gaulle, Apostle of Christian Democracy

What further needs to be said about Charles de Gaulle? The bibliography on de Gaulle is vast, almost beyond the grasp of any individual. No other statesman of the twentieth century has left a more extensive record of his actions and of his views. The memoir literature about de Gaulle is extensive, much of it laudatory, but some critical. In 1990 the *Institut Charles de Gaulle* assembled nearly one thousand statesmen, witnesses, and scholars to pay tribute to de Gaulle's role in world history during what was modestly called "his" century. Publications from this centenary event have added seven volumes of testimonials and specific analyses to the literature, and *Espoir*, the Institut's journal devoted to de Gaulle and the Gaullist legacy, continues to add to the list. Yet, as David Watson observed in his review of Charles Williams's recent biography of de Gaulle, *The Last Great Frenchman*, there is not a fully satisfactory biography of this extraordinary figure, since it is virtually impossible for one individual to master the necessary range of published and unpublished sources. There are good, serviceable, brief biographies that stress de Gaulle's political role and actions but do not attempt an analysis of Gaullism or of de Gaulle as political philosopher as well as man of action. And there are somewhat longer, single-volume studies that provide overviews of de Gaulle in a life-and-times approach. Jean Lacouture has written a three-volume biography that is of impressive length, primarily based on French sources and interviews, but Lacouture's achievement is a literary monument to a historical one, rather than a critical biography based on a wide range of sources.

If a definitive biography of de Gaulle remains to be written by a patient scholar's hand, there is another method of approach to de Gaulle by way of explaining his legacy through an analysis of his writings, an explication of their political meaning, and a relation of this thought to political action. Daniel Mahoney's recent monograph falls within this category. Mahoney has declared his work to be "neither biography nor history, but rather a work of political reflection" (p. 13). The book is, instead, an interpretation of de Gaulle and an expression of the author's political views about the condition of modern, mass democracy. Both fit within a strain of Christian democratic–that is, liberal Catholic–political thought. De Gaulle is explained and revealed to an anglophone audience from a sympathetic perspective. Rather than searching for new sources, Mahoney revisits de Gaulle's published writings, and he uses these texts as the basis for meditations upon de Gaulle's contribution to an understanding of modern democracy, even of a crisis of modern, materialistic civilization.

Though not entirely uncritical, this work of reflection has an almost reverential tone, and it is intended to provide lessons and insights to "Anglo-Saxons" (mostly Americans), who have yet to receive or to appreciate the Gaullist message and who in the majority are seen to be wrong-headed about de Gaulle and prejudiced in their views. Mahoney, who teaches political science at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, and is author of *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron* and editor of a selection of Raymond Aron's essays, *In Defence of Political Reason*, asserts without providing any concrete evidence that American prejudice against de Gaulle "rests on an almost willful refusal to consider the intellectual foundations of de Gaulle's political project as well as the soul or character of that remarkable man" (p. 13). By educating Americans on the thought and action of de Gaulle, Mahoney hopes to free them from that prejudice.

The only American, or Anglo-Saxon, for that matter, mentioned in the text who seems to have held this willful prejudice against de Gaulle's political program is Franklin D. Roosevelt. Mahoney thus joins a chorus of

critics who have deplored FDR's stubbornness for refusing de Gaulle recognition until rather late in the war and showing little sympathy for him or his purposes. Mahoney cites de Gaulle's letter to Roosevelt of October 26, 1942, in which he made a clear statement of his commitment to democracy. De Gaulle also attempted to enlighten the American president about his determination to defend French interests. This letter was delivered under strained circumstances by two of de Gaulle's more abrasive diplomats and it was lightly dismissed by both Roosevelt and the State Department.

In this book, not only insights into the thoughts of de Gaulle may be obtained, but misunderstandings about France can be cleared up. In the preface Pierre Manent of the *College de France* states that one of two reasons for reading Mahoney's book is that "at a time when it seems that the Anglo-Saxon world is turning against France with an incomprehensible aggressiveness, it helps explain profoundly my country to the American public" (p. vii). By "aggression" Manent apparently refers not only to traditional Anglo-French *mesententes* but to American trade representatives' behaviour in recent GATT negotiations. Whether or not American public opinion, or even the attitude of Jack Valenti and other moguls of the American film industry, will be changed by the publication and sale of this study, remains to be seen. However, the book is significant not only for the insights that it brings to de Gaulle's political thought but for what it reveals about sources of Franco-American misunderstandings as seen through the eyes of Mahoney and his French advocate, Pierre Manent.

The book is organized around certain themes: de Gaulle's conception of leadership, his view of France and its mission within Western civilization, the moral responsibility of the individual within society, the nature of democratic practice, and de Gaulle's vision of Europe. Within these themes Mahoney comes to grips with certain difficult Gaullist concepts, such as "grandeur," his "certain idea" of France, the problem of authority, and even the nature of Gaullism. He is also at pains to demonstrate what de Gaulle was not: he was neither Bonapartist, nor Nietzschean, nor fascist, nor cynically Machiavellian. In some good measure Mahoney sets out to correct what he perceives to be mistaken interpretations by critics, not all of whom are identified.

To determine de Gaulle's views and principles, Mahoney turns to the General's prewar writings, which preceded de Gaulle's entrance onto the stage as a historical actor and are therefore less influenced by any need for self-justification. He uses de Gaulle's analysis of Germany, *La Discorde chez l'ennemi* (1924), to demonstrate de Gaulle's rejection of Nietzsche. It was precisely a Nietzschean pursuit of excess, an ambition without limits, that was the source of Germany's downfall in World War I, since the German elites, according to de Gaulle, had become corrupted through a fascination with Nietzsche. De Gaulle's wartime achievement in animating the Free French movement could be seen as a kind of case study of Nietzsche's "will to power" in overcoming the material weakness and limitations of the Free French movement to assert France's restoration as a major power deserving of a place at the Yalta conference table. But Mahoney rejects any interpretation that sees de Gaulle asserting his individual will merely for the sake of power itself since he was acting for the French people. The author takes issue with those, such as the wartime colleague Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie, who thought de Gaulle had composed a "personal salad" of Nietzsche, Charles Maurras, and Niccolo Machiavelli. Mahoney observes that de Gaulle found the same Nietzschean tendency to ignore limits in Napoleon I, which was the basis of his criticism of the Emperor in *La France et son armee* (1938), a book that Mahoney also admires as an essential Gaullist text.

If neither Nietzschean nor Bonapartist, de Gaulle certainly advocated both strong leadership and the pursuit of grandeur as antidotes to the mediocrity of modern, parliamentary democracy. Mahoney finds in *Le Fil de l'epee* (1932) both a prescription for leadership and an implied critique of the banal and "decadent" Third Republic. He notes de Gaulle's connection with the Christian democratic lay movements that were critical of the secular Republic and opponents of unfettered capitalism, a connection noted by others, such as John Hellman, who is less certain than Mahoney about the non-fascist or anti-democratic aspects of these movements. Condemnation of republican weakness was not a call for totalitarian style dictatorship or even a flirtation with fascism, according to Mahoney, since de Gaulle also rejected Maurrasian "illiberalism, indulgence toward fascism, and unconcealed anti-Semitism" (p. 11).

Mahoney cites de Gaulle's wartime speech to the Cercle Francais at Oxford University on November 25, 1941, as a classic Gaullist critique of totalitarianism and fascism. For de Gaulle, measure and balance served as antidotes to the excesses of personal power or totalitarianism. A politics of grandeur divorced from any sense of measure and proportion would lead to a Napoleon, just as an unlimited national and personal self-assertion would bring the fascist temptation. Greatness consists in the

recognition of limits. For de Gaulle, a sense of restraint and proportion emerged from his "Catholic recognition of moral boundaries and political limits" (p. 7), which set the terms of political action and personal ambition. Politics was not simply the pursuit of power and glory as ends in themselves, but had a moral dimension. Mahoney insists that de Gaulle's Catholicism was profoundly felt and informed his thought and action. In this, as in other aspects of this work, Mahoney touches on topics that others have considered. Jean-Marie Mayeur's essay, "De Gaulle as Politician and Christian" in Hugh Gough and John Horne, *De Gaulle and Twentieth Century France*, makes more or less the same point. De Gaulle's religious principles kept him from any fascist temptation, according to this perspective.

At the same time a forceful leader had to display certain Machiavellian qualities, although Mahoney denies that de Gaulle was crudely Machiavellian. De Gaulle sanctioned the use of "egotism, pride, hardness and cunning" in the pursuit of higher goals and interests (p. 63). As an example, Mahoney points to the deliberate and calculated deceptions practiced as de Gaulle maneuvered toward negotiating Algerian independence. Nor was the "man of character" necessarily "nice," even if democracy valued certain social virtues such as cooperation, sociability, and "good cheer," and he cites *Le Fil de l'epee* to confirm de Gaulle's view that the application of force was inevitably unpleasant (p. 57). De Gaulle's abrasiveness was tempered by what Mahoney sees as qualities of magnanimity, justice, and moderation. Who is the modern, Gaullist prince in Mahoney's portrait? He is no less than "a Christianized and democratized magnanimous man!" (p. 47).

Mahoney finds intellectual antecedents for de Gaulle in the writings of turn-of-the-century authors such as Maurice Barres, Henri Bergson, Emile Boutroux and, above all, Charles Peguy, whose emphasis on the need for a mystique to lift politics above the mundane has been noted by many writers. On this point, there is little new in Mahoney's discussion. "Mystique" meant the pursuit of grandeur as a means of rising above the presumed mediocrity of the modern democratic regime, which is "above all prosaic and bourgeois" and concerned only with individual rights. What Mahoney finds in de Gaulle is a criticism of modern democracy's leveling tendency, a denial of merit and hierarchy. A modern, democratic leveling brings a trend toward the lowest common denominator, and Mahoney cites Alexis de Tocqueville's regret at the absence of meritorious leadership in America, producing a democracy that is "mild, humane and utterly mediocre in character" (p. 93). Gaullism's stress upon high goals and a sense of mission offered an alternative to mediocrity without abandoning a certain conception of republicanism or "moderate" democracy that would allow the possibility of strong leadership.

The combination of a mystical, spiritual quality to leadership and a Machiavellian pursuit of French national interests found expression, again during the war, in de Gaulle's assertion that he represented the sense of renewal to be found in both Joan of Arc and Georges Clemenceau, though Roosevelt commented trenchantly that he could not be both. In this sense, Roosevelt identified these two figures with the underlying division between a secular and a clerical France. For de Gaulle, the spiritual commitment to France and certain values could be reconciled with republicanism, and he made no secret of his desire to find in the pursuit of grandeur the means of uniting the France of the Old Regime with the notion of popular sovereignty that emerged from the Revolution without falling into either totalitarian or Bonapartist alternatives.

Throughout his explication of Gaullism as advocacy of a Christian democratic approach to modern democratic practice, Mahoney stresses the moral foundations at the heart of de Gaulle's political views about politics, which served as a guide to his actions. De Gaulle emerges from Mahoney's account as a man of action, but one who is restrained by moral concerns and whose writings reveal a political moralist in the same sense that Raymond Aron or de Tocqueville were commentators on modern democracy and on the modern, human condition. As a political moralist, de Gaulle serves as an antidote to a certain approach to political science that Mahoney deplores, in which there is a vain (he believes) attempt "to replace a political science of human nature with value-free causal analysis, and a democratic ideology that resists the distinctions and inequalities which nature contributes" (p. 57).

De Gaulle's pursuit of grandeur was also an effort to assert the values of the moderate state against forces of spiritual and political disintegration that the author fears will result from a modern, mass democracy unmediated by moral concerns or by a concept of "grandeur." De Gaulle redirects our political and moral bearings. The politics of grandeur emerge as a way to overcome the "sterilizing homogeneity of modern mass society" and its dehumanizing qualities, and enables fulfillment of the longing for community to overcome the fragmentation and egoism of modern culture. As the author notes:

"Modern individualism, as opposed to Christian or medieval liberty, divorces the individual from the 'natural equilibrium' of authority and liberty..." (p. 103). At this point the author's own political and cultural perspective comes to the fore. De Gaulle does not refer even nostalgically to a lost, medieval sense of community, and Mahoney provides no reference to any Gaullist text to substantiate what appears to be a moral assertion.

The book is at once a discussion of de Gaulle as political moralist or advocate and the author's own meditation upon a perceived crisis of modern, democratic society in which collectivization and standardization are the dangers inherent in modern democratic practice and to which Gaullism offers a basically conservative corrective. As such, the book is part of an ongoing debate over the modern order, and it reflects a culturally conservative fear of the leveling trends of the modern, democratic order. Mahoney argues that the legacy of Gaullism may very well be a reconciliation of the Old Regime with the revolutionary legacy to produce Francois Furet's "republic of the center," but it is also a warning against complacency and a loss of spiritual values amid the pursuit of pleasure in modern democracy.

Mahoney leaves us with a de Gaulle whose message remains an appeal for greatness against the leveling tendencies of mass society and a loss of spiritual direction. De Gaulle reconciled Christian and democratic values, answering Peguy's fear about a France at once de-republicanized and de-Christianized, but Mahoney notes de Gaulle's pessimism, at the end of his life, about the future and adds his own fear that a loss of spiritual values will result in the triumph of "the materialistic and hedonistic pursuits of our commercial societies" (p. 148). This may be the lesson directed toward the American branch of the Anglo-Saxons: that American commercialism and cultural imperialism may lead the French to prefer Coca-Cola and rock and roll "to the burdens of a politics of grandeur," and this is what the current cultural wars, including resistance to American imperialism, are all about. In this sense Mahoney has written neither "a biography nor a history" but a kind of tract about de Gaulle as political moralist and preceptor and about the relevance of de Gaulle to a contemporary crisis of Western democratic society as Mahoney perceives it.

There is little that is new or unknown in this book for the specialist in twentieth-century France: de Gaulle's political antecedents are well established; his connection with the Catholic critics of the 1930s has been revealed; his ideas of grandeur and leadership are familiar; and FDR's incomprehension is a hearty perennial of Gaullist scholarship. What is interesting about this book, then, is what it reveals of current attitudes toward the ways in which certain of de Gaulle's admirers re-frame the problem of cross-cultural misunderstandings. Fifty-six years after de Gaulle appeared on the historical stage, he may have achieved a consensus of popularity and approval in France, but he still serves as a way of illustrating the frictions that have persisted between the French and Anglo-Saxon cultural spheres and even their visions of modern, democratic society. But for a historical insight into the foundations for these ongoing misunderstandings, more is needed than another explication of the Gaullist text that relies upon a limited selection of recent Gaullist scholarship and that overlooks another, far more nuanced body of work on de Gaulle and his relations with the "Anglo-Saxon" world.

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