

Stewart is more direct on Tocqueville, the totem figure in a sociological tradition that was “to a significant extent, a figment of Aron’s imagination” (p. 172). In the book’s most impressive chapter (chap. 5), Stewart weaves together Aron’s active construction of French political sociology with twentieth-century battles among sociologists to stake claim to their discipline. Aron acknowledged that Tocqueville never described himself as a sociologist, and “admitted that neither Montesquieu nor Tocqueville had formatively influenced his own thought” (p. 171). Nonetheless, these thinkers and the Aron-invented “tradition” to which they belonged had a role to play in displacing Marxist and Durkheimian approaches to sociology in Aron’s own time. The political, pluralistic Tocqueville of Aron’s pen could stand against the social, deterministic Durkheim, reshaping the French academy.

As with the entire book, the discussion of Tocqueville complicates Aron’s status as the torchbearer of an established French tradition. Chapter 6 continues this line of thought, recasting the idea of an Aron-led “liberal moment” in France as a series of moments prompted not only by the thought of other figures (Claude Lefort, François Furet) but also by critique rather than emulation of Aron. Here, the author suggests that the very idea of a homogeneous French liberal tradition stretching from Montesquieu to Aron and beyond changes in light of such evidence about its deliberate idealization and instrumental use in academic debates. At the very least, Aron’s admission that he had never heard of Tocqueville during the years when he was formulating his own worldview should give us pause about the reality of a single liberal thread running from *Democracy in America* to *The Opium of the Intellectuals*.

Still, Stewart perhaps too quickly downplays Aron’s own words about his debt to Tocqueville, however belated or modest that debt might have been. When Aron described himself as having “played Tocqueville” as he looked on at the events of May 1968, he suggested a wider affinity between Tocqueville’s thought and his own. He sometimes viewed democracy through a Tocquevillian lens that exposed its political crises as spiritual ones, prompted by an egalitarian restlessness that had to be overcome by moral authority. The author suggests as much, but does not follow the premise provided by Aron’s words to a conclusion about tradition. Aron’s thought and, with it, the French liberal take on the problems of twentieth-century democracy were eventually altered by engaging with Tocqueville. And insofar as traditions are as much about active appropriation as passive reception, a point that the author himself makes (p. 169), we ought not to ignore how Tocqueville’s ideas altered Aron’s views of democracy in the 1960s, views that were by that time mature but certainly not fixed.

Despite some earlier scene setting about the meaning of tradition, Stewart largely avoids intervening in recently

resurrected debates about the homogeneity of liberalism spanning continents and centuries. If, as he writes, “Aron’s significance...appears differently depending on the angle from which it is observed,” the same could be said of liberalism (p. 235). The book accordingly emphasizes the heterogeneity and intricacy of the twentieth-century French tradition, in which main players vie for academic influence, using and discarding the mantle of “liberal” when it suited other immediate intellectual or political purposes. This is an important argument, and Stewart should be commended for making it in such a sophisticated way. But it does limit some of what he is willing and able to say about liberalism’s ongoing value and about Aron’s.

Can the history of liberal thought offer us any solutions to current problems? Stewart is quick to caution against an affirmative answer because his story of twentieth-century French liberalism is so tied to its own time. The reader might wonder, however, whether he gives Aron’s relevance too little credit. As the book reminds us, Aron theorized totalitarianism alongside democracy, not as its political opposite but as a threat within democratic political culture. We might revisit his work with an eye toward understanding populism in the present day as a distinct phenomenon but one with the same potential source. Those of us interested in democracy’s pathologies would do well to turn to Aron and to Stewart’s important, erudite study of the intellectual’s complex liberalism.

Lessons from Walden: Thoreau and the Crisis of American Democracy. By Bob Pepperman Taylor. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. 240p. \$29.00 cloth. doi:10.1017/S1537592720001747

— Jennet Kirkpatrick , Arizona State University
jennetk@asu.edu

The title of *Lessons from Walden*, an extraordinary book, is puzzling. The word “lessons” brings to mind a kind of education that Thoreau, the central figure of Taylor’s book, might well have balked at. Lessons require compliant, passive students who, doing as they are told, lack any sort of freedom or personal direction over the shape of their education. Thoreau rejected this sort of overly disciplined, utilitarian instruction, instead preferring intellectual expeditions that were risky, passionate, and personal. If a lesson connotes the pap of conventional classrooms, Thoreau opposed it.

The reference to lessons in the book’s title also raises a question: Is *Lessons* a conventional endeavor, with Taylor instructing us didactically in the central insights of *Walden*? Such lessons require an authority figure, and Taylor has the credentials to fill this role. He has studied and written about Thoreau for more than 25 years.

For those who are looking for it, the book does provide a conventional argument, a lesson, that fits squarely into

current academic debates about Thoreau's politics. Thoreau has long been viewed as a detached, wry, even disdainful critic of American politics. For some, he is a hermit who washed his hands of the morally corrupting world of public affairs by decamping to Walden Pond on July 4, 1845. Within the burgeoning amount of scholarly attention devoted to Thoreau in recent years, this apolitical or anti-political line of interpretation has been challenged. Thoreau was a vocal critic of the Mexican War, he disapproved of the subjugation of Native Americans, and he advocated protecting the natural environment. Perhaps no other political issue compelled Thoreau more than slavery, an institution that he fought to eradicate in a variety of ways. In addition to speaking publicly about the harms of slavery, Thoreau occasionally assisted on the Underground Railroad, vehemently objected to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, and publicly supported John Brown after his doomed assault on Harpers Ferry.

Taylor's *Lessons* is firmly in the political camp, depicting Thoreau as an engaged critic of his day who, though skeptical of institutional government, sought to foster political and moral development among his fellow citizens. Indeed, Taylor goes further in arguing that Thoreau's *Walden* speaks to two central challenges in American democracy today: disquiet about the character of democratic citizens and the destruction of the natural world. When Taylor speaks about the problems of the "moral character of (relatively) free peoples," he is mostly concerned with the feckless, unreflective, and changeable nature of US citizens (p. 5). Lacking an ability to control or discipline themselves in the face of a consumer culture that offers an overabundance of choice, US citizens are inconstant and inconsistent. They demonstrate "moral blindness" and engage in "morally obtuse" behavior (p. 14). Taylor sees this propensity most recently in their choice of a national leader; American citizens chose a president in 2016 who "mirrors" them perfectly in his anarchic and capricious tendencies (p. 13).

In the introduction Taylor turns to a number of contemporary critics who have emphasized the rootless and unprincipled character of US citizens, situating Thoreau alongside Stephen Carter, Jean Elshtain, Mark Lilla, and Patrick Deneen. Thoreau, like these present-day thinkers, understood that the feckless tendencies of citizens are best addressed by strengthening personal character and individual responsibility. US citizens can find true freedom, not the ersatz freedom of consumer choice, by withdrawing from society and turning inward. Taylor argues that Thoreau departs from conservative critics, however, in the kind of new democratic citizen he hopes to create. Where conservatives aim to produce citizens who will restore conventional modes of life, Thoreau seeks the opposite: to inspire citizens who are "rebellious...breaker[s] of traditions, and civilly disobedient" (p. 25). His new democratic citizens favor heterodoxy, unconventionality, and nonconformity.

Lessons has three central chapters, each of which explores a theme from *Walden* that Taylor sees as especially relevant to our day. The first chapter, "Simplicity," focuses on Thoreau's suggestion that citizens seek a simpler life, one withdrawn from the never-ending appetite for more and more of everything and from exploitive economic arrangements. Taylor draws on Thoreau's admonition to seek a life of "voluntary poverty." He elaborates this concept, first, through a careful reading of *Walden* and, second, by reference to relevant thinkers such as Aldo Leopold, Wendell Berry, Christopher Lasch, Jill Lepore, and Bill McKibben.

The second chapter, titled "Different Drummers," takes on the issue of politics most directly by considering Thoreau's admonition to cultivate our own sense of moral integrity. On Taylor's reading, withdrawing into the realm of individual conscience does not result in withdrawing from political concerns. Thoreau was focused on the "prepolitical cultivation of character and dispositions he thought of as essential for any decent social and political order" (p. 70). Thus, for Thoreau, politics is derivative of morality, not sovereign from it (p. 96).

The third and final chapter in the body of the book, "Learning from Nature," carefully attends to Thoreau's understanding of nature and situates it into modern-day environmentalism. This is a rich, layered chapter that puts Thoreau in conversation with Charles Fish, Carl Becker, Gifford Pinchot, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, and David Deutsch. Wendell Berry, a figure Taylor sees as closely aligned with Thoreau, is discussed as well. The overriding message of the chapter is that Thoreau understood nature as a moral teacher. To learn from nature, we need to withdraw into it, grow wild within it, and open ourselves up to the transcendental moral insights that nature has to give.

Lessons, then, offers a compelling, well-thought out argument about the relevance of Thoreau in our political time. Because Taylor does an impressive job of linking Thoreau to a wide range of contemporary thinkers and critics, *Lessons* will lend itself well to graduate and advanced undergraduate seminars in democratic theory, American political thought, and environmental politics.

Though this is certainly enough, the book goes further. It offers something less orthodox and, for this reader, more special. At key moments in the text Taylor manages to re-create a central moral tension found in Thoreau's work and to reanimate it for contemporary readers. In "Simplicity," for instance, Taylor introduces the Possibility Alliance, a utopian agrarian community that has withdrawn from mainstream society to live as simply and as lightly on the land as possible. The community's utopian exit has a radical, destructive dimension to it: "This withdrawal...is viewed as the greatest challenge the hated system can face: if people refuse to participate in these broader institutions, they will collapse under their own

weight” (p. 46). These “unsettlers” are not able to withdraw as fully as they might like, however. When member Sarah Wilcox-Hughes suffered complications after giving birth and required nine months of hospitalization, the costs were absorbed by Medicaid. Does this show the blatant hypocrisy of Possibility Alliance’s mission or its stunning naiveté? Does it demonstrate the moral absurdity of Thoreauvian exits, or does it reveal a fundamental contradiction within them? Taylor opens up these questions, but in a move that will frustrate some readers, he does not resolve them. At these points the text invites readers to experience a moral quandary, not a lesson. In keeping with the most challenging moments of *Walden, Lessons* prompts us toward a moral education. Like Thoreau, Taylor is cultivating new democratic citizens who will not, he hopes, be as morally blind or obtuse as their predecessors.

Lessons does suffer from some problems. Gender and race are undertheorized, and the recent literature on Thoreau could be used to greater effect. Taylor’s prose can have an ambling quality to it, and some faith in him as a guide is required. But, even given this hiccup, Taylor manages to channel something essential about the spirit of Thoreau. Thoreau was interested in journeys—moral, intellectual, and physical—as well as destinations, and he understood walking and self-reflection as linked. For these reasons and many others, one suspects that Thoreau would have approved of Taylor as a fellow traveler and would have liked *Lessons* quite a bit.

Smarter Ballots: Electoral Realism and Reform. By J. S. Maloy. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019. 239p. \$84.99 cloth.

Rule by Multiple Majorities: A New Theory of Popular Control. By Sean Ingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 202p. \$100.00 cloth.
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— Emilee Chapman , Stanford University
emileebc@stanford.edu

How might democratic institutions be improved to give citizens more control over their governments? *Rule by Multiple Majorities* by Sean Ingham and *Smarter Ballots* by J. S. Maloy offer complementary approaches to answering this question. *Rule by Multiple Majorities* explores the concept of popular control. The goal of this conceptual exploration is to articulate a coherent and attractive account of popular control that can be used for assessing political institutions (including, but not limited to, elections). *Smarter Ballots*, in contrast, largely brackets theoretical questions that Ingham addresses. Instead it examines specific types of electoral reforms we might adopt in the hope of further empowering voters. Together these two books expand the conceptual toolkit for assessing and improving democratic institutions. Scholars and reform advocates alike should take note.

Maloy argues in *Smarter Ballots* that researchers and reformers should focus less attention on contest structure reforms and more on ballot structure reforms. Contest structure refers to the way that electoral outcomes translate into political or policy outcomes. Single-member district systems and proportional representation systems differ in their contest structure. Ballot structure, by contrast, refers to the kind of information that voters are able to provide on a ballot and how votes translate into electoral outcomes. Ranked choice voting and plurality rule voting differ in their ballot structure.

Maloy aims to persuade readers that multi-mark ballots (MMBs), especially those that allow voters to rank or grade options, do a better job of empowering voters than single-mark ballots (SMBs). SMBs create a familiar “dilemma of disempowerment” for voters. They force many voters to choose between increasing the chances of victory for their most preferred candidate (or party), on the one hand, or increasing the chances of defeat for their least preferred candidate, on the other hand.

The dilemma of disempowerment hampers voters’ ability to elect superior candidates and weakens electoral accountability. Corrupt and incompetent incumbents often benefit from vote splitting among their opposition or from lesser evil choices. The 2002 French presidential election offers one colorful illustration: bumper stickers exhorted voters to support the incumbent Chirac, with this slogan: “Vote for the crook, not the fascist” (p. 67).

According to Maloy, multi-mark ballots can free voters from the dilemma of disempowerment. Much of *Smarter Ballots* is devoted to evaluating different types of MMBs. Maloy argues that the most promising types are ranking ballots and grading ballots. Ranking ballots are used in many elections around the world and have some momentum in conversations about US electoral reform. Ballots that allow voters to *grade* candidates (where winners receive the highest mean or median grade) have not been widely used outside of experimental settings. Maloy argues, however, that given their potential benefits, grading ballots deserve more attention in electoral reform conversations.

Smarter Ballots largely brackets conceptual questions about what it means to empower an electorate with disparate preferences. Instead, its discussion of potential reforms begins by identifying three forms of voter empowerment we plausibly care about: the power to select future officeholders from an adequate set of alternatives, the power to use electoral outcomes to effectively sanction incumbents for their performance in office, and the power to express judgments over ballot options (p. 18). Maloy assesses how different reforms might contribute to each of these forms of empowerment, with a heavy focus on the third. This practical approach allows Maloy to devote substantial time to examining the details of concrete reform proposals.