

academic, and other contexts, while progressive in intent, actually reproduces, in novel and intensified forms, class and racial hierarchies” (p. 19). Second, “the institutionalization of transgender produces [certain] selves as unintelligible,” as all identity politics are wont to do (p. 109), though here (as often) it is “the young, the poor, the people of color who are . . . having to un-know what they know about themselves . . . as being, inherently, false and outmoded” (p. 135). But while he argues that the category “cannot be understood unproblematically either as a tool for social change or as a descriptor of gender variance transhistorically or cross-culturally” (p. 204), he never wavers that the category has brought gains: “an understanding of gender variance as socially valid, publicly claimable, and free of the stigma of pathologization, . . . an emerging field of transgender studies which . . . challenges the claims of scientific, objective knowledge . . . [and a reframing of] the moral and ethical questions in terms of the negative impact of medical, religious, scientific, and legal practices and theories on transgender lives” (pp. 140–41).

I have a few questions and reservations. Valentine focuses on “the margins of the collective ‘transgender,’” turning, for example, to “African American and Latina fem queens of the balls and Meat Market” (p. 108). While I understand the richness to be found in the borderlands, I am not sure why a choice between margins and center had to be made, or what its costs might be. Also, despite his references to drag kings, those transitioning from female to male, and butch lesbians, he bases the book on the experiences of men. He theorizes more (and well) about the absence of women (p. 74) than he does from their presence p. (97). His explanations (for example, “the institutionalization of the collective mode of transgender [has] been formed precisely around the same absence” [p. 69]) are unconvincing. He does better with feminism, though there, too, it sometimes seems a bit of an afterthought, appearing often at the end of discussions and even, most powerfully, at the end of the book. Finally, pervasive gender stereotypes within transgendered communities merit more attention.

Both books are relevant to political scientists. Browne’s “gender” is related to definitions of justice, ideas about human nature, debates about the relationship between bodies and politics, and explanations of inequality, as well as to policy issues including the wage gap, gay marriage, and family–work conflicts. Valentine’s “transgender” is related to theoretical debates about the relations “between sexed body, social gender, and sexuality” (p. 4), and to policy issues including antidiscrimination law as well as definitions of hate crimes and pathology. The bottom line of both is captured by Valentine (p. 246): “[T]he categories we live by—must live by—have histories, politics, and economies and produce effects that can be as debilitating for some as they can be liberating for others. The goal is to question how, why, when, and with what effects self-making is other-making.”

French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville: Liberty in a Levelled Society? By Annelien de Dijn. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 230p. \$99.00. doi:10.1017/S1537592709090318

— Jeremy Jennings, *Queen Mary, University of London*

For the past twenty years or more, interest in the political thought of the French liberals has been on the increase. Long forgotten and ignored, French liberalism is now seen to have been a far more vibrant entity than was thought by those prepared to consign it to the long list of historical losers. The revival began with work on Alexis de Tocqueville and has since spread to Benjamin Constant (soon to be honoured with a *Cambridge Companion* volume), François Guizot, the Doctrinaires, the Idéologues, and others. Montesquieu has reclaimed his rightful position as one of the great writers in the history of political thought. There is still much that remains to be explored. Major writers such as Madame de Staël and lesser ones such as Edouard Laboulaye and Charles de Montalembert remain clouded in undeserved obscurity.

To that extent, the volume by Annelien de Dijn builds on an already substantial body of scholarship and, in doing so, turns its gaze to parts of the story of French liberalism that have not previously been explored. Her subject is what she calls “aristocratic liberalism” (p. 5). By this she means “a very particular set of ideas, developed by a number of thinkers . . . who drew their inspiration mainly from Montesquieu’s *Esprit des lois*” (p. 5). She further specifies that aristocratic liberals believed that “a levelled, atomized society, which lacked . . . intermediary bodies offered no protection against despotism” (p. 5). This provides the central question of her study: “[H]ow was the discourse of aristocratic liberalism, originally formulated in the political and intellectual context of the mid eighteenth century, adopted in and adapted to the new political and intellectual needs of the post-revolutionary period?” (p. 9) At least two substantive claims follow from this. The first is that this tradition of thinking in France was at least as important as the Jacobin tradition (p. 8). The second is that until the 1870s, politicians and political thinkers found in Montesquieu’s *Esprit des lois* a convincing analysis of and answer to the problems facing France.

Why was this so? Dijn’s answer is that, in post-1789 France, aristocratic liberalism was revived as a response to revolutionary republicanism and the demands made for a more egalitarian society. More interesting and original is her claim that the revival of aristocratic liberalism was started among the royalist heirs of the counter-revolutionary movement. As implausible as this sounds, it provides one of the most stimulating sections of the book as, to prove her point, Dijn works her way through the writings of the likes of Charles Cottu, Nicolas Bergasse, Vincent de Vaublanc and other equally forgotten Restoration pamphleteers and publicists. These men, she

affirms, were not “mindless reactionaries” but were committed to “a very specific, Montesquieuan conception of how liberty was to be preserved in a post-revolutionary world” (p. 67). In brief, they believed that only a stable and vibrant landowning nobility could provide a foundation for liberty.

The remainder of the book largely concentrates on exploring the parameters and character of the debate between royalists and liberals that followed from this claim. Here Dijn takes the reader into more familiar territory but again she seeks to develop an unfamiliar argument. Despite their initial enthusiasm for the English, aristocratic model of government and society, French liberals, Dijn argues, became increasingly critical of aristocratic liberalism and came to entertain grave doubts about both the viability and desirability of effecting an aristocratic restoration. The irreversible social and economic changes since 1789 rendered such a class obsolete and thus incapable of acting as a barrier to despotic government. An alternative therefore had to be found.

Dijn explores this part of her argument at some length and draws her evidence from a wide variety of sources. If she writes of Constant and Guizot, she also examines the opinions of lesser figures such as Charles Dunoyer and Charles Ganilh. She looks at debates about the bicameral system, decentralization, press freedom, and, most importantly, inheritance laws. Her conclusion is that liberal responses came in a variety of forms, but ultimately (and especially after 1830) they concurred in believing that the bourgeoisie and a bourgeois political order provided the most likely safeguard of liberty and order. Nevertheless, they continued to agree with their royalist opponents—and presumably with Montesquieu—about the dangers of a levelled and atomistic society.

Probably the least convincing part of Dijn’s account is her discussion of Alexis de Tocqueville and, specifically, of *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville’s new political science, she writes, was “an attempt to formulate an alternative to the doctrine of aristocratic liberalism” (p. 137). His “highly critical analysis of the rise of democracy,” she continues, “was in many ways inspired by the royalist discourse” (p. 148). As Dijn herself acknowledges, the difficulty here is that we do not know the extent to which Tocqueville was familiar with this literature. She might, however, have consulted the Eduardo Nolla edition of *Democracy in America* (soon to appear in English) for guidance. Either way, it commits Dijn to the position that Tocqueville’s visit to America had little or no impact on what he thought. Somewhat remarkably, Tocqueville’s *Old Regime and the Revolution* is passed over in less than a page. Remarkably, Tocqueville’s text was received at the time as a work of great originality (Tocqueville himself certainly thought that it was original) but, if Dijn’s overall thesis is right, he was saying little that had not been said countless times before and was at most a commonplace.

Where does this lead? To the conclusion that aristocratic liberalism endured into the Third Republic and to a questioning of the distinction and contrast between Anglo-American and French political thought. Montesquieu’s lessons about the need for intermediary powers were not ignored. Indeed, Dijn suggests by way of conclusion that they cast a shadow that reached as far as François Furet and the revisionist historians of the French Revolution.

This, then, is a spirited and ambitious book. It is not always convincing and it frequently asserts more than it proves. At times, the argument is straightforwardly perplexing. It does, however, have the important merit of delving into corners of nineteenth-century French political debate long hidden in darkness and of recovering a political vocabulary rendered marginal by the dominant discourses of the age. As such, it is a welcome contribution to the growing literature on French liberalism.

The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance. By Penelope Deutscher. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 222p. \$90.00.
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— Lori Marso, *Union College*

Why read Simone de Beauvoir today? In spite of the iconic status of *The Second Sex* (1949) and its author, both are more often dutifully cited than carefully read. Yet, within the past decade or so, many theorists have fruitfully returned to the work and life of Beauvoir. Of these, Penelope Deutscher’s elegant and generous new book provides the most compelling case for reading Beauvoir with new eyes, just as Beauvoir brought a fresh perspective to the philosophies she engaged.

Repeatedly stressing the “web-like conceptual structure” of *The Second Sex* and Beauvoir’s other work (p. 8), Deutscher traces the plural disciplines and multiplicity of voices on which Beauvoir drew. Beauvoir kept diverse voices alive in her texts, and resisted resolution or closure. This has frustrated some readers and inspired attempts to determine whether Beauvoir was indebted most, or exactly how much she was indebted, to Sartre, Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, or Heidegger. Other readers have traced and affirmed the most developed or consistent definition of ethics Beauvoir offers. In contrast, Deutscher celebrates these ambiguities and tensions as inviting the interplay between the conflicting registers in her writing and the ways they challenge each other.

Doing so, Deutscher converts Beauvoir from a thinker that we feel we already know to one who, though recognizable, is also strange, new, and compellingly other. In fact, one of the key terms in Deutscher’s reading is “conversion.” Though conversion is most often associated with deliverance and salvation, the term was borrowed by Sartre and Beauvoir to “describe a possible response to their ontologies” (p. 14). Noting that “conversion” appears fourteen times in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), Deutscher