

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Gobineau, the Royalist

April 2, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

[UPDATE: Now also on Thermidor. (<http://thermidormag.com/gobineau-the-royalist-2/>)]

Just about everyone has heard of, if not actually read, Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau, the racial theorist.

However, we will not be looking much at his racialism, although we will ultimately have to draw some observations on it near the end. Instead, this article is about the lesser known side of Count Gobineau – the intransigent royalist, Bourbon legitimist and conservative pessimist. Although his background and his historiographic debt to the elitist theories of Henri de Boulainvilliers are frequently acknowledged, it goes deeper than that. It is not possible to understand his infamous *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (so horribly butchered by its American Southern translators) without knowing his background as a man of *ancien regime* temperament trapped in “le stupide XIXe siècle,” as Leon Daudet was to memorably describe it later.

It is a curious thing that Gobineau is overwhelmingly remembered purely for his *Essai*. In his lifetime, he was an intellectual with a diverse repertoire – serving in many diplomatic posts, writing novels, travelogues, gaining authority as an Orientalist and admirer of East and Central Asian civilizations [which is one of the reasons why judging Gobineau's views by his *Essai* alone is highly misleading] and mingling with major figures of the day. He was one of the first men to recognize the literary genius of Honore de Balzac at a time when most of his contemporaries overlooked him. In addition, despite his disdain for the principles of the Revolutions of 1848, he may have actually inadvertently contributed to them in his capacity as a French minister to Greece, by being a capable defender of the liberal nationalist statesman Ioannis Kapodistrias, a man who was distrusted both by Klemens von Metternich and Friedrich von Gentz, two of the primary architects of the conservative order established in the Congress of Vienna.

A complex figure, indeed.

We will focus on a posthumous oeuvre of Gobineau's, *La troisième république française et ce qu'elle vaut* [What the French Third Republic is Worth (<https://archive.org/details/latroisimerp00gobiuftt>)] (1907), compiled from his manuscripts by Ludwig Schemann, a German enthusiast of his, a racial theorist who translated Gobineau's *Essai* into German, and a man who inhabited volkisch circles.

He opens up thusly: “The Republic, in France, has this peculiarity, that no one wants it and that everyone keeps it.” (p.1) Indeed, the Third Republic had a very peculiar opening. The President was Patrice MacMahon, a Catholic traditionalist and French general whose devotion to law and order was so literal that he gladly served as the guardian of a de facto republican constitution, awaiting the day when restoration was to become opportune. The Chamber of the Deputies (parliament), however, was majority republican. In 1877, MacMahon dismissed republican PM Jules Simon and substituted him with the conservative Duc de Broglie. The result was a motion of no confidence from the Chamber. MacMahon then called parliamentary elections (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_legislative_election,_1877) for that year, resulting in a royalist loss and an indefinite setback for any prospects of a restoration. The people had spoken: No gods, no masters.

Woops.

Following the letter of the law in such a state of emergency was to prove an error. To be a legalist among anarchists, what a tactical dilemma. It was this naive faith that being “correct” would in of itself (as if driven by Providence) lead to royalist principles prevailing, that Gobineau mocked (pp.32-33):

“In short, instead of keeping their feet firmly supported on the ground of the fact which gave them their *raison d’être* and strength, the royalists as well as their rivals, and thus engaging their rivals, imagined that it was better, more philosophical, more profound, to swim in the middle of the air while they threw themselves into the clutches of this dilemma:

Revolutions, you say, are pernicious, and we ought not to. Well, but we did; They have borne, even, several harvests of fruits. We do not need to do anything at all, and we are of your opinion. Now, are we the people of 1830 and you want to throw us on the ground? You are inconsistent. There must be no revolution. Are we the people of the Empire? You must keep us by the judicious hatred of change. **We are the Republic? You are forbidden to touch us, for if the supreme merit of Legitimacy is to prevent revolutions, do not do so.**

[...]

From the day when the administration, which had taken the place of sovereign power, had begun its career of skeptical defections, royalism became an individual misfortune, honorable to the victims, useless to the country, as it had been in the hands of the English Jacobites.”

Not all regimes compatible with whatever is the prevailing positive law necessarily obey a higher law. Moreover, the comparison to Jacobitism is surprisingly apt. One of the big historical ironies is that the most famous Jacobite sympathizer, Viscount Bolingbroke, was to become a notable influence on English and American republicanism. By styling one’s self as the *true* defender of ancestral liberties, one is ready to be sucked in to all the puerile modern discourse of that same ambiguous term “liberty”.

Gobineau also sensed another problem, in that royalists engaged in a primitive nostalgic thinking likening France before 1789 as Eden that Frenchman has since “fallen” from the grace of, but that can be trivially restored with a crowning (pp.46-47):

“This tree is certainly capable of producing more than a stick can not; it can give leaves, flowers, apples or pears; but it needs a suitable soil to settle, a gardener to care for it, water it, maintain it, or else it dies. It is a law of nature. As long as royalty in France is not provided with what can make it prosper, it is worth what the Republic is worth and the situation of things does not give it anything to serve it.

The complete emptiness of minds towards it is seen by an infallible criterion. Let one question or hear a royalist talk about his disappointed hopes and the general state of the country. He will say, shaking his head:

‘The cause of evil is selfishness. No one thinks beyond his own interests; then we love to have fun; then one thirsts for money; then one wants to rise above what one is; then, one is disgusted by all discipline; then...’

The list goes on and it is long. Ultimately, the royalist naively describes man as son of Adam, as he has always been known in creation since he was driven out of paradise. He seems to believe that before the Revolution, man was quite different and much better; disinterested, obedient to the laws, without evil instincts, and as the good books of the seventeenth century say, particularly marked by his ardent love for his kings. The royalist, who, generally and unfortunately, has little knowledge, having great fear of the mind, on the pretext that it is the spirit which made the Revolution, while it is simply stupidity, the royalist piously believes that formerly he was virtuous, and that it is very wrong not to be so; But that if the King regained his crown, he would undoubtedly become again. How? By what process? He does not explain himself, even to himself; But he is sure of what he is advancing; [...] that good righteousness alone triumphs, and provided that it is maintained, we shall see how happy we shall be!

This is the reasoning of the mass of the royalist party. You can only give it what it is worth. **It is lamentable that these people have so poorly learned the history of their country that they take the time of Louis XIV for the full time of true greatness...** They, the men of tradition, disregard it; they ignore it and thus pay their ignorance and softness by the powerlessness in which they are seen, they can neither help themselves nor help others, and remain languishing in the present misery, they are not and can not be of any assistance.”

As is implied, Gobineau was a provincialist who loathed absolutism. He wrote (p.33) that “It is not a common fact in history to have seen, as we have seen, a monarchy of eight centuries, to collapse in eighteen months, with hardly anyone except the isolated devotee seeking to maintain it. The insurrection of Lyons, of Languedoc, was much less favorable to the monarchy’s prospects than what was aroused by the provincial notions; **La Vendee and Brittany attempted the great things which they saw accomplished for religion.**”

See also: the Cristero War in Mexico. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cristero_War) It is the defense of the faith that has been among the strongest motivators for the lower classes to defend tradition. Unfortunately, such a tactic no longer appears doable in most of the West where faith has been systematically rooted out.

The absurdity of legislative deliberation as a substitute for custom is well expressed (p.61):

“The English also hold to the law, and are equally convinced of the impossibility of abrogating it without the most minute precautions. It is precisely because of this wise feeling that they remain attached to it and that the law is respectable, strong and respected, but the French! Their laws are not laws of state, are not the consecration of inviolable rights; they are not provided with any kind of the characteristics of longevity; they are only the punches promised by one faction to another, and the day when the conciliabule [assembly] of the three, supported by the committee of the eighteenth, supported by the majority of The Chamber of Deputies, confessed by a combination in the Senate, cause the Senate to be thrown out of the window and the seven-year presidential term broken up; the victors suppose that they have given birth to a system which, because it will be legal in their own way, will have an assured existence before it? But the unfortunate embryo, hydrocephalous and stuffed with venomous humours, will have died precisely because it will be born.”

However, he was willing to concede that there was a certain noble spirit to be found in the republican vision of the “liberty of the ancients,” though one that had been completely malformed and misapplied in modernity:

“It is not in the least, that in principle, a form of government consisting essentially in giving itself periodically a new elective chief, is either abhorrent to common sense: in no way do all states which have practiced it, soon recognized its disadvantages, but also its advantages, and it must be believed that the latter are of importance, for among those States which did not extend over too great an area, like the Swiss cantons, free imperial cities, or other political entities of the same kind, have preserved it with the greatest care, and have never voluntarily despoiled themselves: Venice, Florence, Lucca, Sienna, nor, in the past, Athens, Cyrene or Miletus...

Only, in order that public opinion may be so constant, so affectionate to such a regime, it must absolutely be remarkably homogeneous, which disappears as soon as it emanates from too many different heads. Holland was already subdivided into too many divergent interests; Venice escaped the pitfall only by the passing of an already narrow aristocracy to a still narrower oligarchy. The Swiss cantons lived subdivided, feeding themselves physically and morally only on dairy products; If they ever arrived, and became more complicated, in their different kinds of food, to concentrate their federative form beyond a certain limit, it is to be feared that they would lead to a democratic despotism; These ancient prototypes, somewhat old-fashioned, of the political wisdom of modern times, are now under the knot of the mob, waiting for new civil wars and the solution of difficulty in dictatorship.”

Instead, the modern republic has an innate fondness for perpetual crisis as its governing principle (p.3): “They make no secret of their plans: they are perfectly determined to scratch away all that is. They do not want the dukes, the stockbrokers, the civil servants, or the rich industrialists of to-day. By peremptory reason, that under different denominations, titles, and appellations, they pretend to become themselves what those people already are. **But their flower of hope would be lost if they were to lose that present Republic which they do not like, since it alone will furnish them with what they wish, by virtue of instability... In their eyes, the Republic is only worthy of instability; Instability alone is its merit, and if it were to be deprived of it, if, for example, it took a form which would determine a lasting foundation, they would immediately grant it a hatred as implacable as if it had become a monarchy.**”

That sums up how I feel every so often that I see election campaign posters when walking around. As Gobineau mentions, “Democratic leaders do not want to be masters,” although they certainly want to be comptrollers, it seems.

Speaking of instability, an excerpt from another lesser known work of Gobineau (<https://archive.org/stream/GobineauLaVaniteNationale/Gobineau%201871-5>) (*Ce qui est arrivé à la France en 1870*), written in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War of 1871 that was to install the Third Republic to begin with:

“Europe, annoyed, irritated, tired, annoyed, sees for eighty years this country dancing from one revolution to the other. The most spiritual country in the world, the most heroic and the model of the whole world, which everyone looks at, made the moderate revolution of 1789, brutal of 1792, fearful of 1794, brazen of 1796, and the Empire and the First Restoration and the Hundred Days and the Second Restoration and the Revolution of July and the Republic of 1848 and the Second Empire, and the Republic of September 4, 1870, so that, in proportion to the years, it would have had an average of about six years to enjoy each of its governmental inventions; having not failed to shake Europe by its agitations, or at the very least give it cause for worrying.”

“The consequence of this is easy to draw. The part of each nation which desires rest has hated France because France incessantly disturbed the state which seemed to her the most desirable [monarchy], and the preservation of which was judged by her as a sacred duty. As for the other party, which sought upheaval and tumult, its aversion to France was not less strong, since this country, thrown so easily into incessant spasmodic convulsions, and like an epileptic, calms down almost at once and after having punished those who listen to them [the other party] in any way...”

Always oscillating haphazardly without purpose, such is civic life since the long nineteenth century.

Of the separation of powers (p.55): “The theory of the three powers was thus found: the King would fight in perpetuity against the Lower House and the Upper House would serve as the perpetual shield of one against the other. As for the country, they began to ask for majorities, and the representatives of these majorities must necessarily have been capable men, virtuous, and distinguished in every way that the nation could contain, and that during the election was to be distilled before the public.”

Sounds like a plan!

Of socialism, Gobineau’s elitism comes into play (p.21): “They [the Socialists] say that the inequality of the intellect is an absolute obstacle to fraternity; nothing is more true. It is even the greatest and most insurmountable obstacle. We have seen, in ancient times, when the hierarchies of birth, rank, and position were absolutely uncontested, the Constable Anne de Montmorency sat very freely, in such a village inn, with carters [cart drivers] and with the laborers, and spent very agreeable hours in the company of these men. It is because the Constable, who was a great nobleman, only prided himself on being a good and solid soldier, and had nothing to say to these rustic guests but what the latter could already understand.”

Keep a distance from the rabble, and you will be their faithful servant. Court them directly, and you suffer. However, he does positively recognize the intrinsically paternal and almost neofeudal nature of socialist demands (as I have noted before (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/03/04/the-yearning-for-lord-and-manor-in-socialist-thought/>)), but recognizes that the shepherds here will abuse their flock:

“We can only hope, want, and act under their leadership in a rather restricted circle; But we shall be clothed, fed, and lodged without remission; The great mass of men will be bound and closed in a mode of implacable felicity and of a most humble nature; But, at least, what is given to you will be held, and we shall probably have all that we have been promised, for it will not be much. Despite these benefits, two points are frightening: the overwhelming authority of the shepherds, their irresponsibility towards their flock, the quasi-divine character that these perpetual feeders will not fail to put on very quickly; The luxury, the hieratic [priestly] splendor of which these illustrious and sublime personages will not fail to surround, to enhance, to announce very soon their august roles. The sacrosanct inspector and the divine delegate will be said to kneel. That’s what makes us think. What is also necessary to admit is the complete stupor in which humanity, stuffed with potatoes and cheap meats, is of necessity reduced to such a state.”

“Humanity, stuffed with potatoes and cheap meats” ... this is the end result of fetishizing the “working class” to the detriment of all other elements in civilization. He laments how (p.16) “everything has turned to employment and menial jobs have turned into crafts,” that “these bands of hungry utilitarians are hardly of a nature to understand the essence of governments entrusted to the hand of an irremovable master and this because Honor is the basis of the monarchy.”

Indeed, regarding the devaluation of meaningful labor, what Louis Blanc very quickly did when France erupted into another revolution in 1848 was to shove workers in the most degrading public works programmes that were the National Workshops (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Workshops). The socialist says that the essence of man lies in his capacity for labor, and thus builds him a future where he can toil in perpetuity for the product of his labor, equally rationed for all into table scraps.

This vicious circle of nothing, Gobineau encapsulates in p.55 regarding the psychology of the representative voter:

“Naturally they are not happy and often repeat one of their favorite phrases: ‘We are led to the abyss’. They fall, it is not a great evil. But the land falls with them. Again, they are not people to be surprised. They ask for forgiveness from God and men and begin again. **If the world should collapse, they must have the parliamentary system; they must be deputies; they must speak; they must place their electors, place their protectors, place their families before placing themselves; to place is the great business of their lives and to direct and lead to the abyss.** It was agreed. Then they come out of it again and again, so they start anew.”

Such is Gobineau’s royalism: the musings of a man who the times (ever a-changing, as always) had left behind.

Now, as I promised, a quote from the *Essai* (p.161, Ch IV (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/37115/37115-h/37115-h.htm#CHAPTER_IV)):

Every new acquisition of territory, by conquest or treaty, brings an addition of foreign blood. The wealth and splendor of a great empire attract crowds of strangers to its capital, great inland cities, or seaports. Apart from the fact that the conquering race – that which founds the empire, and supports and animates it is, in most cases, inferior in numbers to the masses which it subdued and assimilated; the conspicuous part which it takes in the affairs of the state, renders it more directly exposed to the fatal results of battles, proscriptions, and revolts. In some instances, also, it happens that the substratum of native populations are singularly prolific – witness the Celts and Slaves. Sooner or later, therefore, the conquering race is absorbed by the masses which its vigor and superiority have aggregated. The very materials of which it erected its splendor, and upon which it based its strength, are ultimately the means of its weakness and destruction. But the civilization which it has developed, may survive for a limited period. The forward impulse, once imparted to the mass, will still propel it for a while, but its force is continually decreasing. Manners, laws, and institutions remain, but the spirit which animated them has fled; the lifeless body still exhibits the apparent symptoms of life, and, perhaps, even increases, but the real strength has departed; the edifice soon begins to totter, at the slightest collision it will crumble, and bury beneath its ruins the civilization which it had developed.

A cruel dialectic, indeed. It even has an almost anti-imperial subtext to it: do not conquer savages lest savage blood water down your own. There is no eugenic light at the end of the tunnel that offers a way out. Civilization is both progress and decay in one. Gobineau's racialism is a rumination on a decaying Europe, a Europe that betrayed tradition for a New Order. A New Order that, though the people within it may be capable, is plagued by the fact that "manners, laws, and institutions remain, but the spirit which animated them has fled; the lifeless body still exhibits the apparent symptoms of life, and, perhaps, even increases, but the real strength has departed." This signifies a much deeper malaise than what immigration restriction and segregation can fix alone, and hence Gobineauan Aryanism is more rightly considered a meditation on aristocracy than a positive programme for building Overmen and thriving societies, as later racialists like Vacher de Lapouge would offer and that most racialists today fancy themselves to be. But a racialism without aristocracy, a government of honor, of tradition, of firm dogmas to animate the race in question that is meant to be preserved, is ultimately little more than a racialism of mandarins and clerks.

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10 thoughts on "Gobineau, the Royalist"

1. IronTsar says:

[April 2, 2017 at 8:46 am](#)

Which right-wing thinkers have influenced your thinking and do you respect a lot ?

[Reply](#)

o [Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur](#) says:

[April 2, 2017 at 9:51 am](#)

I haven't really been influenced that strongly by Big Thinkers anymore, or conversely by blogs, either. I've sort of arrived at my positions from a "dialectical" means by consuming various old histories, memoirs, monographs and political tracts.

I'll be talking more about French ultra-royalism and Prussian conservatism in the future, though, so you should start seeing clearer outlines by then.

If you **really** want some names right now: Sir Archibald Alison, 1st Baronet; Carl Ernst Jarcke; Orestes Brownson; Fisher Ames; Comte de Montlosier; Emile Faguet. That ought to keep you occupied for some time. I'll hopefully be quoting all of them and much more as the blog keeps on rolling.

Reply.

- IronTsar says:

April 2, 2017 at 10:07 am

Thank you very much for your answer ! And thank you for your very interesting blog! I will be looking forward to your articles about French ultra-royalism and Prussian conservatism. Have you any affinity with right-wing thinking of Russia or Spain?

Reply.

- Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

April 2, 2017 at 10:09 am

I know much less about Carlism than I would like to, but I hope to remedy that eventually.

I do know some of the greats of Russian conservatism: Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Ivan Ilyin, Sergey Bulgakov, Konstantin Leontiev and Lev Tikhomirov. But I have not read all of their works comprehensively yet.

Reply.

- Howard J. Harrison says:

April 5, 2017 at 2:12 pm

*If you *really* want some names right now: Sir Archibald Alison, 1st Baronet; Carl Ernst Jarcke; Orestes Brownson; Fisher Ames; Comte de Montlosier; Emile Faguet.*

Interesting list. By the decayed standards of the postmodern U.S., people seem to think that I have read reasonably widely, but I have never read any of these. Indeed, I have so much as *heard* of only one of them. (Apparently, people are wrong.)

One looks forward to your reviews as they arrive.

Reply.

2. Michael Rothblatt says:

April 2, 2017 at 1:33 pm

It could be said that the Revolution wasn't the Seed of Destruction, but merely the Fruit of Destruction, the Seed being Absolutism. Many a criticism was leveled at the wrongs perpetrated by French monarchs, and even the occasional anonymous letter to the king. Isn't it strange that it was Vendeeans who were so far from the king that rebelled against the Revolution, and not the Parisians who were so close to him? Defeating the croquants, angelets, bonnets rouges, pitauds, etc. and the Fronde might have established absolute power, but it also alienated all the classes of France from the institution of monarchy, and thus French monarchy became a house with no base.

Reply.

3. slumlord says:

April 3, 2017 at 1:30 pm

Gobineau also sensed another problem, in that royalists engaged in a primitive nostalgic thinking likening France before 1789 as Eden that Frenchman has since “fallen” from the grace of, but that can be trivially restored with a crowning

It's not just Royalists but, I'm afraid, traditionalist Catholics who hold their own version of this fallacy. By doubling down on the practices of the past they believe they can restore the Faith, as if it were a matter of technique.

Reply

4. Howard J. Harrison says:

April 5, 2017 at 2:08 pm

Gobineau lists: “..., Sienna, Past, Athens, ...”.

I know of Sienna, and everyone has heard of Athens, but where or what is *Past*?

The question is not important. I just wondered. Google and Wikipedia don't seem to know.

Your and Gobineau's final point is haunting. In this connection, if I mention Scandinavia, am I changing the subject? I have a vague sense which I cannot quantify that, for 2000 years, Scandinavia has been the reservoir from which the European stock has been replenished. That has been Scandinavia's hereditary role. If Scandinavia now abandons its role, then what is to become of the rest of us?

Judging by your quotes, Gobineau would not be optimistic.

Reply

o Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

April 5, 2017 at 2:28 pm

Thanks for catching that. Fixed it to “nor, in the past”.

You seem to be echoing Madison Grant to a degree. I am certainly not hopeful for Scandinavia, either. Especially when you consider the historical fact that they were one of the first to adopt absolutism, Denmark the first of all (although the Kingdom of Sicily under Frederick II may have arguably been an earlier example).

And *especially* not today's completely deracinated and feminized Scandinavia.

Reply

5. Pingback: [X-Post: Thermidor] Sociobiology as the Freudianism of the Right | Carlsbad 1819

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