

CHAPTER ONE

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INTRODUCTION:  
THE ITINERARY OF A  
CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL

Great necessities, angers, and enthusiasms have made us impatient toward everything that stops the will and slows action. . . .

[But] wills must acknowledge limits. We have dearly learned old truths that periodically are erased from the social memory: rights exist that it is not just to offend, rules that it isn't prudent to violate. Respect for these rights and these rules imposes itself even when transgressing them appears to provide an opportunity to remedy a great evil or procure a great good. For there is no more profound or durable evil than their discredit, there is no more salutary and fecund good than their being placed outside of assault and attack.<sup>1</sup>

— Bertrand de Jouvenel

WHY A BOOK ON THE French political thinker Bertrand de Jouvenel, the overwhelmed contemporary reader may be tempted to ask. He was, after all, in the judgment of Dennis Hale and Marc Landy, “the least famous of the great political thinkers of the

twentieth century.”<sup>2</sup> But his relative lack of fame in no way qualifies the genuine greatness of his thought. There are many reasons to recommend the rediscovery of this unduly neglected thinker. To begin with, Jouvenel’s voluminous oeuvre managed to combine profound theoretical reflection with remarkable attentiveness to the issues of the age. His work scrupulously addressed the present age without ever losing sight of those permanent verities that inform responsible thought and action. Furthermore, as Pierre Manent has pointed out, Jouvenel had the additional merit of writing with eloquence and charm in an era that too often succumbed to the spirit of abstraction and the allure of “scientificity.”<sup>3</sup> He was a civic-minded moralist as much as a political philosopher and social scientist. In the spirit of his two great nineteenth-century inspirations, Benjamin Constant and Alexis de Tocqueville, he renewed an older wisdom that recognized that “there are things too heavy for human hands.”<sup>4</sup> Like these forebears, he set out to rescue liberalism from that revolutionary inebriation that refused to bow before any sacred limits or restraints. Jouvenel never succumbed to the temptation of confusing the Good with an unfolding historical process or with the unfettered will of the one, the few, or the many, even as he accepted the inevitability and desirability of the open or dynamic society. He was the conservative liberal par excellence, a principled critic of progressive illusions who fully appreciated the folly of attempting to stand athwart the historical adventure that is modernity.

In the years before World War II Bertrand de Jouvenel made a living from journalism.<sup>5</sup> He wrote for such prominent newspapers as *Le Petit Journal* and *Paris Soir*. During those years he became a

practitioner of political celebrity journalism and had occasion to interview a host of famous statesmen—and tyrants—such as David Lloyd George, Neville Chamberlain, Winston Churchill, Mussolini, and Hitler (as we shall see, his controversial interview with Hitler would haunt him for the rest of his life, even though it was considered to be something of a coup at the time of its publication). In the years after 1945 he was simultaneously a journalist, professor (he taught or lectured at various times at Oxford, Cambridge, Cal-Berkeley, Yale, and at the Institut d'études politiques and the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences of the University of Paris), political philosopher, political commentator, and pioneer author of sober, economically literate, and philosophically informed excursions into ecology and “future studies.” He thus brought to his writings the powers of description typical of a journalist, the philosopher’s appreciation of enduring and universal truths, and an admirable openness to the contribution that social science could make toward understanding the transformations characteristic of modern life. In addition, his writings go a long way toward recovering the classical understanding of political science as the architectonic science whose ultimate subject matter is nothing less than the comprehensive good for human beings.<sup>6</sup> In important respects, then, Jouvénel’s work bridges classicism and modernism, political philosophy and social science, the traditionalist’s preoccupation with “the good life” and the enlightenment Left’s preference for the open or dynamic society.

Bertrand de Jouvénel was a Frenchman intimately familiar with and sympathetic toward the United States; his English (spoken with an American accent) was impeccable. He regularly acknowl-

edged the indispensable contribution that Britain, the cradle of parliamentary liberty, had made to the cause of freedom in the modern world, and he wrote respectfully, even admiringly, about the American constitutional order (the gravitas that still marked the United States Senate in the 1950s particularly impressed him).<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that he was the first French political thinker of any note to rediscover the political wisdom of what might be called the “English school” of French political philosophers, those nineteenth-century French liberals such as Constant, Guizot, and Tocqueville who were horrified by revolutionary despotism and who admired the civility and moderation characteristic of Anglo-American political life. Yet for reasons that will be fully explored in the final chapter of this work, Jouvenel has yet to receive his rightful measure of recognition in his native land. In France his reputation has been marred by the lingering impression that he was a collaborator of sorts during the Second World War (he was not) and by the fact that he committed two major faux pas in the period leading up to the war,<sup>8</sup> the first being his aforementioned interview with Adolph Hitler in February 1936 (we will explore this issue at greater length in chapter 7 of this book), and the second his ill-advised membership in Jacques Doriot’s Parti populaire français (PPF) from 1936 until 1938.

Thus, though there is no shortage of self-proclaimed “liberal” political thinkers in France today, few explicitly acknowledge indebtedness to the political philosophizing of Bertrand de Jouvenel (the intellectual circles around the journals *Commentaire* and *Futuribles* are something of an exception in this regard). In France he remains a rather marginal figure best remembered for his 1945

classic *On Power* and for his forays into political ecology and future studies. Indeed, Jouvenel's intellectual achievement has never been fully acknowledged by either the French general public or intellectual establishment, not even by those who share his core philosophical principles. As a result, some of Jouvenel's most important theoretical works are not even in print in France today (this is the case with both *Sovereignty* and *The Pure Theory of Politics*), while many more of his major works are available once again in the United States (thanks especially to the good offices of Liberty Fund and Transaction Publishers). In the English-speaking world, in fact, Jouvenel is now considered to be a political philosopher of some importance, one of the most penetrating conservative-minded thinkers of the twentieth century.

In the years between 1945 and 1968, Jouvenel produced an impressive body of work belonging to the tradition known as conservative liberalism. These writings explored the inexorable growth of state power in modern times, the difficult but necessary task of articulating a conception of the common good appropriate to a dynamic, "progressive" society, and the challenge of formulating a political science that could reconcile tradition and change while preserving the freedom and dignity of the individual.

Jouvenel was far from doctrinaire in his approach to political matters. A critic of the centralizing propensities of the state, he nonetheless appreciated that political authority was indispensable for maintaining social trust as well as economic equilibrium. A charter member of the classical liberal Mont Pèlerin Society (whose leading light was the distinguished economist and social theorist F. A. Hayek), he rejected the individualist premises underlying mod-

ern economics and reminded his contemporaries that the good life entailed something more fundamental than the maximization of individual preferences.<sup>9</sup> In his mature writings, Jouvenel vigorously challenged the “progressivist” conceit at the heart of modern thought, the illusion that social and economic development necessarily entail moral progress. But he never rejected modernity per se. The coherence and insight that characterize Jouvenel’s synthesis is perhaps the foremost reason for studying him today.

*Beyond Facile Progressivism:  
How Jouvenel Became Jouvenel*

In decisive respects, Jouvenel was a child of his time. But he can properly be called a political philosopher precisely because he ultimately succeeded in transcending the progressivism that was the dominant prejudice of his age. This was no easy feat. Jouvenel was born in 1903 into a milieu that more or less took the inevitability of progress for granted. His father, Henri de Jouvenel, was an influential politician and respected journalist, a sometime Dreyfusard, a member of the Senate of the Third French Republic, and the French representative to the League of Nations in Geneva.<sup>10</sup> He was, as Pierre Hassner has put it, “a constant fighter for liberal causes.”<sup>11</sup> His mother, Sarah Boas, came from a thoroughly assimilated Jewish family. She was a cultivated, caring woman who ran a famous Parisian salon and played a not insignificant role in the creation of the modern Czechoslovakian state.<sup>12</sup> Jouvenel’s stepmother was the redoubtable novelist Colette, with whom he even had a youthful affair.<sup>13</sup> “The entire Jouvenel family,” writes Hassner,

“was aristocratic, political, and literary.”<sup>14</sup> Jouvenel’s urbane parents embodied the best of the antebellum spirit, of a civilized progressivism that seemed to be the inevitable future of a Europe that had finally mastered its social passions. But the Great War would change everything. As Jouvenel wrote with hindsight, in those years Europe had “marched toward an apocalypse” as if “demons breathed their strength to ferocious agents and blinded the well-intentioned.”<sup>15</sup> But it took Jouvenel three decades to fully liberate himself from facile progressivism, to genuinely appreciate that there was “no natural” and upward “course of history,”<sup>16</sup> that war and tyranny remain ever-present human possibilities.

Bertrand de Jouvenel wrote about the first forty-two years of his life with grace, eloquence, and no small note of pathos in his 1979 memoir *Un Voyageur dans le siècle*.<sup>17</sup> This work provides a fascinating account of Jouvenel’s youthful intellectual and political itinerary and is indispensable for understanding the sinuous path by which he arrived at his mature intellectual orientation. Nor is it of merely biographical interest. Jouvenel’s “spectator’s narrative” quickly becomes “the lament of a generation”<sup>18</sup> (the one born between 1899 and 1907)<sup>19</sup> that had been too young to serve in the war, had repudiated bellicose passions, and had committed itself to noble ideals of social reform and Franco-German reconciliation. Jouvenel’s generation, thoroughly decent but blinded by excessive hopes, was destined to recover a sense of historical tragedy only at the terrible price of experiencing the consequences of the decomposition of and assaults on the European bourgeois order. Jouvenel and his coevals experienced forms of war and tyranny that had been literally unthinkable to those who had been accus-

tomed to take the achievements of liberal civilization for granted.

Jouvenel's reconsideration of painful events and memories was, he writes in the preface to his memoir, nothing less than a "sort of descent into Hell."<sup>20</sup> Throughout the 1960s and '70s, Jouvenel's professional life had been focused on exploring "possible futures" (in light of enduring political and philosophical questions, to be sure),<sup>21</sup> and neither introspection nor self-evaluation came naturally to him.<sup>22</sup> He freely admits that he was less than eager to confront his own "faux pas" or to relive the terrible drama by which Europe was "carried away by the Furies and [lost] its civilized countenance."<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, he mustered the courage to do so with impressive penetration and honesty.

Most of Jouvenel's American readers know little about Jouvenel's intellectual itinerary and are not usually aware that he was not always the sober conservative liberal political thinker of his major writings of the postwar period. The young Jouvenel dreamed of a "new order"—not the militarized state and society trumpeted by totalitarians of the Left and Right, but a pacified, cosmopolitan liberal order where an energetic state would limit the "anarchy" of the market without in any way threatening fundamental human liberties. Still, because of his deep-seated commitment to liberal freedoms, Jouvenel from the beginning rejected a command-and-control approach to the management and regulation of the economic order. Even as a moderately leftist critic of the established social order, he affirmed the broad principles of what would later come to be called a "social market" economy. He later regretted calling his first book *L'économie dirigée* (The Directed Economy), since it created the impression that he supported

efforts to substitute the heavy-handedness of the state for the free initiatives that naturally emanate from civil society.<sup>24</sup> Even in this youthful work, published in 1928, Jouvenel adamantly rejected the fashionable idea that “the hour of initiatives” was somehow a thing of the past.<sup>25</sup> He favored a modest version of “indicative planning”: in his view, the state should limit itself to establishing conditions that are truly conducive to balanced economic and social development. But the individual as owner, producer, and consumer must remain free to act.<sup>26</sup> The state should neither own the “means of production” nor dictate the forms of particular economic enterprises. At the age of twenty-three, Jouvenel perceptively warned about the danger of a “shackled” economy that aimed to replace the market with the cumbersome intrusions of an allegedly omniscient state.<sup>27</sup> Even as a youthful socialist, Jouvenel appreciated that such pretensions would lead to social petrification or worse and did nothing to advance the prospects for a humane economy.

Nevertheless, Jouvenel maintained that a bold strategy of political and economic reform was required to overcome the European social crisis that was tearing apart the moral and physical fabric of the liberal order throughout the 1930s. He came to believe that laissez-faire economic policies had failed miserably and that the state must take a much more proactive role in addressing the “scandal” of unemployment and overcoming the social crisis of the age.<sup>28</sup> This preoccupation with the evils of mass unemployment and the failure of established economic models is particularly evident in his 1933 book *La crise du capitalisme américain*.<sup>29</sup> Jouvenel had no fundamental illusions about either Communist or Nazi totalitarianism, even if he didn’t take the full measure of either

until he composed *On Power* during his Swiss exile in 1943 and 1944. But he remained clearly focused on the crisis of the Western democratic world and welcomed efforts at bold experimentation to overcome unemployment and to set the social order aright again. He despised fascist tyranny but at the same time showed some indulgence for the mobilization of society that was a central feature of revolutionary despotism. In the 1930s, Jouvenel seemed to lose sight of the dangers that necessarily accompany the unleashing of state power even at the service of necessary reforms. In the face of a truly unprecedented social crisis, Jouvenel for a time succumbed to the impatience that is one of the hallmarks of the modern intellectual.

Bertrand de Jouvenel's mature political philosophy arose from his experience of modern tyranny and from reflection on his own intellectual and political misjudgments in the period leading up to World War II.<sup>30</sup> This experience and reflection convinced him of the indispensability of liberal constitutionalism and of the need to rethink its moral foundations. Earlier, in the prewar period, he had lost faith in the powers of renewal of the French Third Republic if not of liberal democracy itself. Looking for means to revitalize France, he had joined the Parti populaire français, a right-wing populist party headed by an ex-Communist by the name of Jacques Doriot.<sup>31</sup> He left the party in late 1938 in no small part because of the PPF's support of the Munich Pact and the political dismemberment of Czechoslovakia (Jouvenel had served as personal secretary to that country's foreign minister—later to be president—Edward Benes in the spring of 1924 and had long-standing personal and political ties to the Czechoslovakian democracy).<sup>32</sup>

While never fascist or protofascist in any sense of these terms (contrary to the ludicrous distortion put forward by the Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell in an indiscriminate assault on Jouvenel in his controversial book *Neither Right Nor Left*),<sup>33</sup> Jouvenel nonetheless was impressed by the relative vitality of the totalitarian regimes in contrast to the weakness and decadence of the European democracies. This strain of thought is most evident—and disturbing—in his 1941 tract *Après la défaite*,<sup>34</sup> published during the Occupation. In that work he contrasts the youthful renewal and communal tendencies of the totalitarian regimes with the corruption and decomposition of “liberal” Europe.

Despite his agonizing doubts about the prospects for Europe’s liberal democracies, Jouvenel was neither a collaborator nor an apologist for Nazi totalitarianism. But as a secret intelligence officer for the Service de Renseignements de l’Armée française, Jouvenel was ordered to maintain contacts with his old friend Otto Abetz, at that time the German ambassador to occupied France (in the late 1920s the two had begun to develop a close friendship as a result of their common commitment to Franco-German reconciliation).<sup>35</sup> His mission was to clarify German intentions toward unoccupied France at a time (well before November 1942) when Vichy was still something less than a puppet of the Nazi regime. Such so-called fraternizing undoubtedly contributed to the widespread impression that Jouvenel had collaborated with the German authorities at least in the early years of the war. In fact, by 1942 Jouvenel had already joined the French Resistance in his native Corrèze. In *Un Voyageur dans le siècle* Jouvenel discusses his growing realization that the Vichy regime was becoming a servile instrument of the

totalitarian Nazi state. He reports his genuine shock in hearing Pierre Laval, a man who had four times served as premier of the French Republic, state on the radio on June 22, 1942 (the first anniversary of the German invasion of Soviet Russia), that he “hoped for the victory of Germany” in the war.<sup>36</sup> After it became clear that the Germans suspected his resistance activities and that he was likely to be arrested, Jouvenel and his wife H el ene fled to freedom in neutral Switzerland. There he researched and completed *On Power* (published in French in Switzerland in early 1945 and in English in 1948).<sup>37</sup> It was that famous work that marked his turn to a realistic and anti-totalitarian liberalism.

### *Jouvenel’s Trilogy*

Jouvenel’s major achievement as a political philosopher is a trilogy of political reflection published between 1945 and 1963, of which *On Power* is the first volume. But the character of the trilogy as a unified intellectual project is practically unknown in this country. His Tocquevillian analysis of the rise of the centralized state, the “Minotaur,” as he famously calls it in *On Power*, is often cited. So too is his lucid critique of the disastrous moral and political consequences of redistributionism in *The Ethics of Redistribution* (originally published by Cambridge University Press in 1952).<sup>38</sup> But a narrow focus on these works has led some to pigeonhole Jouvenel as an anticollectivist or classical liberal thinker. In truth, Jouvenel was neither a conventional classical liberal nor a traditionalist, even if his thought owes something fundamental to both currents of thought. Jouvenel’s other major works, particularly

*Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good* (1955)<sup>39</sup> and *The Pure Theory of Politics* (1963),<sup>40</sup> which together with *On Power* constitute his trilogy on politics, are far less familiar to both French and American readers. Yet these works are arguably his most important because they deal with first principles. In fact, *On Power* is a kind of prolegomenon both to the positive account of liberty and the common good provided in *Sovereignty* and to his later effort to revitalize and modernize classical political science in *The Pure Theory of Politics*.

*On Power* provides an illuminating account of the erosion of intermediate institutions and responsible individuality at the hands of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes as well as by the “social protectorates” established in contemporary democratic societies.<sup>41</sup> Responding to this situation, *The Pure Theory of Politics* outlines the possibility of a political science that is genuinely “behavioral” in character and explores new ways to maintain and renew constitutional government.<sup>42</sup> In this work Jouvenel demonstrates that those who are concerned with maintaining political liberty and civility must master the “game” of politics if they are to succeed. Whether analyzing the social framework of human freedom, the ways in which a few men such as Cassius inspire others to great or notorious deeds (such as the assassination of Caesar), or contemplating the disruptive effects of determined minorities on democratic societies, Jouvenel illustrates the elementary foundation of political action in the capacity of some human beings to move other human beings. He thereby provides the basis for a realistic political science sensitive to the Machiavellian machinations of those who seek to subvert civilized political communities. *Sovereignty*,

the central and connecting work in the trilogy, delineates a dynamic conception of the political good that does justice to the requirements of modern liberty. As Pierre Hassner has rightly observed, *Sovereignty* “holds the key to the passage from the historical approach of [*On Power*] to the analytic perspective of [*The Pure Theory of Politics*].”<sup>43</sup> It is a major contribution to political philosophy that amply rewards repeated study and reflection.

It is in *Sovereignty* that Jouvenel attempts to liberate the indispensable notion of the common good from the “prison of the corollaries,”<sup>44</sup> that is, from its historical identification with the small, homogenous polis recommended by political philosophers such as Plato and Rousseau. Jouvenel reveals the covert complicity that connects the romantic reactionary and the subversive revolutionary: both parties want to “put an end to history” by creating (or re-creating) a harmonious city free of conflict and above the messy contingencies of history. The remarkable equanimity of *Sovereignty* lies precisely in its principled refusal to succumb to either reactionary nostalgia or revolutionary impatience. The “common good” is not a once-and-for-all achievement but rather a never wholly accomplished effort at civic amity that guides the acting citizen and statesman within every existing social order. More deeply, Jouvenel rejects the modernist conceit that man is his own maker and can found a viable human order solely on the principle of the human will. Instead he recommends a spirit of moderation that will allow democratic statesmen and citizens to combine respect for innovation and individual freedom with the recognition that every human order must bow before the permanent verities that ground and guide human freedom and responsibility.

Because of their unforced union of theoretical penetration and practical good sense, I have chosen to concentrate on the political and philosophical reflection of the mature Jouvenel that is contained in these three masterworks of political philosophy. But this book is likewise informed by an attentive study of Jouvenel's early and late writings, particularly his urbane and instructive essays written between 1945 and 1976, his writings on political economy, and his little-known but quite revealing and instructive 1983 book on Marx and Engels (*Marx et Engels: La longue marche*).<sup>45</sup> This variegated body of work is not without its underlying coherence. It is the thesis of this book that Jouvenel was one of the few great thinkers of the twentieth century to challenge the "fearful and atheistic individualism" undergirding philosophical modernity while defending the undeniable achievements of modern constitutionalism.<sup>46</sup> Jouvenel's work bridges classical, Christian, and modern thought in a way that does justice to the social nature of man, the givenness of the world, and the freedom that is a precondition of true human dignity and responsibility. Jouvenel was not alone in undertaking such a project. His affinities with Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin (the two thinkers most responsible for the revival of classical political philosophy in our time) will be readily apparent to many readers of this book. Like them, Jouvenel welcomes citizenship in the modern world without succumbing to the hubris that is all too typical of modernist or progressivist thought. His mature thought has the additional merit of resisting the illusions of modernity without advocating a simple return to either the theory or the practice of the premodern world.

*Beyond the “Civilization of Power”:  
Affections, Manners, and Natural Piety*

I have called Jouvenel a “conservative liberal” for reasons that ought to have become readily apparent. But in important respects his writings ultimately resist ideological classification. They combine searching textual exegesis of classic political and philosophical texts, the insights and warnings of a sturdy if genteel moralist, and discerning analysis of institutions and unfolding political, social, and economic realities. An article of his might typically bring together elegant reflections on the Roman tribunate or the French parlements, the writings of Tocqueville or Sismondi, and the moral foundations of law, with detailed attention to state-of-the-art social science research. At the same time, Jouvenel never lost sight of the fact that “affections” and “manners” were at the heart of political science rightly understood. It was for his abiding recognition of this fact that Rousseau remained Jouvenel’s “favorite author.”<sup>47</sup> In Jouvenel’s considered judgment, a social science that aspires to understand human beings must never lose sight of the question of what deserves our love and what ought to inspire our admiration.<sup>48</sup> As Jouvenel told an interviewer in 1970, both Marxists and liberals pay far too little attention to the manners, morals, and affections that bind the civil order and give social life its texture, dignity, and grandeur.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, modern men were all too often in the thrall of the “civilization of power”<sup>50</sup> and so frequently succumbed to the delusion that the purpose of life is coextensive with the unending accumulation and provision of goods and services. They therefore were apt to neglect or dismiss the affections and senti-

ments, the manners and formalities, that lead self-absorbed men to “treat each other with consideration.”<sup>51</sup> It is important to note, however, that Jouvenel never addressed these matters in an abstract or didactic manner; in *Revoir Hélène*, for example, he paid moving tribute to his beloved wife and best friend of over thirty years, Hélène Duseingneur de Jouvenel, who died of cancer in the mid-1970s.<sup>52</sup> It was in this manner that he provided his readers with a concrete illustration of the power of the affections to elevate the human heart. Jouvenel managed to pull off the rare feat of writing about manners, affections, and social friendship without a trace of sentimentality or political utopianism.

Jouvenel thought well, sometimes too well, of individual human beings (this good-natured tendency of taking individual human beings at their word probably led him to be unduly impressed by Hitler when he interviewed him in 1936 and by the good intentions of student radicals in May 1968). But he came to have no illusions whatsoever about the inevitability of political progress or about the growing rationality of the human race. He knew that things were always getting better and worse at the same time, to cite the felicitous formulation of Peter Augustine Lawler. As evidence of the lack of progress in political judgment Jouvenel told an interviewer in 1970 that while Nicias had warned the Athenian assembly about the imprudence of the Syracusan expedition and Adolphe Thiers had issued prescient warnings against French intervention in Mexico in 1864, no prominent American statesman had delivered a great discourse anticipating future difficulties in Vietnam. (And, he added, those who came to most “ardently denounce” the Vietnam War did nothing to “avert” it in the first

place.)<sup>53</sup> Whatever his personal failings of political judgment, Jouvenel's mature works are informed by a profound sense of historical tragedy. In *The Pure Theory of Politics*, he offers the hard truth that the great political dislocations, historical tragedies, and human passions described so luminously in the narrative of Thucydides or the political dramas of Shakespeare are ever-present human possibilities.<sup>54</sup> The experiences of the French Revolution and of totalitarianism in the twentieth century in particular revealed the vulnerability of a politics of civility to disruption by illiberal, tyrannical forces. This is the theme of Jouvenel's elegant and searching conclusion to the final section of *Pure Theory*, "The Manners of Politics," and is explored at some length in chapter 6 of this book.<sup>55</sup>

Jouvenel was a Frenchman who took his Christian faith seriously even if he eschewed sectarian or ostentatious displays of piety. As we shall see, some of his works, particularly *On Power* and *Sovereignty*, are imbued with a deep if discreet Catholic sensibility. In this connection, he joined a series of conservative-minded political philosophers who exposed the malign political consequences of "the emancipation of the [human] will" and set about to recover a sense of those natural moral limits that frame human freedom and are a precondition of our real dignity as human beings.<sup>56</sup> Jouvenel's reader cannot help but be impressed by the rich evocation of natural, familial, and ecological piety that informs his work as a whole. Jouvenel's writings convey a profound appreciation of the "givenness" of things and articulate the myriad reasons why gratitude is the appropriate response of human beings to their situation in the world. As he told an interviewer from *L'Express* in

1972, he believed that “the sentiment of what one has, appreciating what is given to us, is an homage to God.”<sup>57</sup> For Jouvenel, “sentiments of affection, of respect, and love,” informed by a sense of gratitude for the gratuitousness of being, provide human beings with access to the divine whole.<sup>58</sup> “The wise man knows himself for debtor,”<sup>59</sup> writes Jouvenel in *Sovereignty*. Jouvenel thus had no sympathy for the intellectual conceits that dominated modern thought. Notions such as the “state of nature,” the “autonomous self,” or the “creative” individual who aspired to be “beyond good and evil” were all based on willful denials of the social nature of man and the manifold reasons to affirm the givenness and goodness of human life.

Jouvenel’s sensitive appreciation of the integrity of the natural order of things informed his defense of “political ecology” in contrast to the Cartesian project of limitless human mastery over non-human nature.<sup>60</sup> To the modern project’s evocation of the “mastery of nature for the relief of man’s estate,” Jouvenel preferred to think of the earth as man’s “home,” toward which he had a special obligation of stewardship. The image of “gardening” came naturally to his pen whenever he discussed economic and ecological matters. For example, he wrote in his diaries with heartfelt affection about the trees of his native Corrèze.<sup>61</sup> In Jouvenel’s view, it was not mere sentimentality that led human beings to “venerate” trees. The tree was rooted in the land itself and provided a constant reminder of those things that do not pass away. Rousseau had written that “the breath of man is mortal to man.” Jouvenel took this insight most seriously indeed. The “civilization of power” came at a great price, one that undermined natural piety and that risked the permanent

poisoning and scarring of the natural environment. But science has also shown that the continual regeneration of forests provides invaluable protection against the poisoning of our earthly home. Jouvenel's poetic invocation of the dignity of trees is aimed less at nature worship than at renewing a sense of human responsibility for our natural home. Commonsense environmentalism, attuned to the insights of economic science, could rekindle a practical appreciation of the limits of what Jouvenel sometimes called the "ephemeral civilization."<sup>62</sup> Despite its undeniable achievements, modern industrial civilization depends on the "law of accelerated destruction."<sup>63</sup> The consumer goods of the modern economy are in no way made to last. Even our lodgings are deliberately made with obsolescence in mind. In contrast, to this utilitarian vision that privileges creative destruction over permanence, Jouvenel defended "the culture of the garret,"<sup>64</sup> a world where human beings maintained ties to the past and built (and kept) things that evoked gratitude, and were thus not motivated merely by the economic imperative of progress, with its accompanying creative innovation and destruction. Our lodgings and landscapes should help shape a spirit of piety rather than the self-defeating illusion that we are gods who make ourselves anew with each passing generation. In keeping with the dialectical equanimity of his thought, Jouvenel also understood the value of private property and the indispensability of individual initiative, the latter for the moral health and economic viability of modern societies. He had no illusions whatsoever about the ability of collectivism to produce a humane alternative to the civilization of power, to the ephemeral civilization.<sup>65</sup> He knew that the conquest of nature was inseparable from the

blessings of modern liberty. But if its logic was carried through to the bitter end, the Promethean self-confidence of modern man risked destroying the very preconditions of our humanity.

### *Prudence and the “Art of Conjecture”*

It was for this reason, among others, that in the final stages of his career Jouvenel turned to the study of “prevision.” In the 1960s and ’70s he directed SEDEIS (La Société d’étude et de documentation économique, industrielle, et sociale) and was the guiding hand behind its journals *Chroniques S.E.D.E.I.S.* and *Analyse et prévision* (the “futurist” journal *Futuribles* arose out of these earlier ventures and is now ably edited by his son Hugues de Jouvenel). By this time, he had come to appreciate that the prudent man must reflect assiduously on the possible outcomes of the modern adventure and do his best to steer modern liberty toward “the perpetration of the good.”<sup>66</sup> Jouvenel aimed to reconnect human initiative with its manifold moral dimensions, which requires the recovery of a full sense of man’s obligation to the great “contract” that binds the living, the dead, and the as yet unborn. Jouvenel thus spent twenty years of his life reflecting on how the “amenities of life,”<sup>67</sup> the spiritual and material goods that are necessary for human happiness and flourishing, might be preserved within the ephemeral civilization. This was also, in his view, part of the task of social science. He believed that the social scientist has a special professional obligation to anticipate trouble, to analyze and to suggest how to ward off those social and political forces that might promote tyranny and fanaticism or undermine civility and social comity. In an important

essay, "Political Science and Prevision," originally published in the *American Political Science Review* in 1965,<sup>68</sup> Jouvenel spoke of the political scientist's obligation to help cultivate foresight in public men even as he cautioned about the necessarily "probabilistic" character of conjecture.<sup>69</sup> For him, the cultivation of prudence or foresight was a moral obligation for all agents; it would remain sterile, however, if it remained at the level of mere "precept."<sup>70</sup> Foresight must be transformed from a noble precept to a practical skill if prudence is to find its rightful place in the human city. Jouvenel's professional preoccupation with "possible futures" thus was the furthest thing from naïve idealism or reckless political utopianism. Jouvenel hoped to give a more "systematic" form to the virtue of prudence, he wished to discipline futurist speculation, to articulate a "utopianism divorced from illusion" that was tied to social science research and informed by philosophical reflection.<sup>71</sup>

His 1964 book *The Art of Conjecture* (published in English in 1967) provides the imitable model of such a humane, disciplined, and morally serious futurism.<sup>72</sup> In this impressive work, Jouvenel insists that the future cannot be known with any kind of certainty. At best, "possible futures" ("futuribles") can be limned. Jouvenel's self-described task is a modest but demanding one: to make the discussion of the "possible" a "trifle more rigorous."<sup>73</sup>

Jouvenel freely accepts Raymond Aron's and Karl Popper's critiques of "facile optimism" and "historicist" thinking.<sup>74</sup> He also provides an excellent critique of "system-based modes of prediction" of the kind famously developed by Comte and Marx.<sup>75</sup> His chapter on Thucydides and game theory shows how the art of conjecture is inherent in the very nature of decision-making and there-

fore is essential to the cultivation of prudential judgment. Game theory, in contrast, presupposes a “limited, predetermined set of possible futures.”<sup>76</sup> It narrows or truncates what is possible. Game theory is not so rigorous or scientific after all.

Jouvenel ably shows how “prevision” becomes ever more important in the dynamic society, in a world where custom and precedent can no longer be relied on to predict or guide human behaviors.<sup>77</sup> But Jouvenel’s goal remains broadly conservative and admirably humanistic: he aims to prevent human beings from becoming the playthings of history and technology, mere objects of inexorable forces, and thus to avoid C. S. Lewis’s “abolition of man.”<sup>78</sup> To illustrate the dangers inherent in a certain kind of futurist speculation, Jouvenel even provides an instructive and entertaining account of famous, misguided predictions in the past.<sup>79</sup> *The Art of Conjecture* not only limns a morally serious, anti-scientific futurism that links good sense to social science; it also provides his readers with a splendid classical liberal education along the way. Jouvenel’s futurist writings are thus less a departure from his intellectual itinerary than they are a concrete illustration of the ability of this essentially conservative man to fully engage the problems and issues of the contemporary world.

### *Conclusion*

Bertrand de Jouvenel’s practical judgments were not always beyond reproach. He was a less sure-footed guide to history-in-the-making than was his close friend and contemporary Raymond Aron (although Jouvenel was in some respects a deeper, more philosophi-

cal thinker). Aron was right about all the key issues of the age (especially those related to the protracted conflict between liberal democracy and totalitarianism that dominated the greater part of the twentieth century) and was more successful than Jouvenel in illustrating the enduring relevance of Tocquevillian wisdom for grappling with the dilemmas of modern society.<sup>80</sup> In the seventh and final chapter of this book we will explore the tension between Jouvenel's considerable theoretical achievement and the occasional unsteadiness and unreliability of his practical judgment. But Aron was certainly right, when responding to the calumnies of Zeev Sternhell, to observe that Jouvenel was not only "one of the two or three leading political thinkers of his generation" but a man who was "worthy of respect, even with regard to [his] mistakes."<sup>81</sup> This book hopes to demonstrate that the enduring wisdom of Jouvenel's great postwar writings far outweighs the misjudgments, real or imagined, that have so far inhibited him from attaining the full recognition he merits in his native France.