



A FEW WORDS ABOUT JULIEN FREUND

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He was born a hundred years ago, in January of 1921, in [Henridorff](#), in the region of [Phalsbourg](#), on the borders of Moselle Lorraine and Alsace. Four years ago, a tribute was organized for him and chaired by the philosopher and historian of ideas, [Chantal Delsol](#), who is his former student, and who just recently mentioned her teacher [on KTO](#), saying that she was "the pupil of Julien Freund," thus, evoking a "medieval filiation" with her teacher, while stressing that he was Aristotelian.



Julien Freund.

Sociologist, philosopher, "political thinker," Julien Freund's originality is obvious. Jean-Philippe Vincent, economist, ever mindful of ideas, who recently published [a book on conservatism](#), underscores this originality. He presents Freund as "one of the few political thinkers that France saw with the birth of the 20th century, along with [Jacques Maritain](#), [Bertrand de Jouvenel](#) and [Raymond Aron](#)." And he adds: "Of them all, however, he is the least known, even though his work has recently met with renewed interest..." Witness the [book about him](#) by Pierre-André Taguieff, and the reissue of Freund masterful book, *The Essence of the Political*, originally published in Paris, in 1965.

Taguieff describes Freund as the great "non-conformist," and calls him a "dissatisfied liberal-conservative." This is a rather fitting tribute to a man whose trajectory includes not only being the thesis supervisor of Chantal Delsol and [Michel Maffesoli](#), but the one who introduced France to Max Weber (1864-1920) and Carl Schmitt (1888-1983). Freund was born on January 9, 1921 in Henridorff, in that part of the Moselle very close to Alsace, which is the homeland of the Alsatian dialect. His family came from a modest background. Emile, his father, a locomotive driver, was a socialist sympathizer. Marie Anne Mathis, his mother, was a peasant. He was the eldest of six children. His secondary education was in Metz and Sarrebourg. At the age of fifteen, he began the Première Supérieur at Fustel de Coulanges high school in Strasbourg. His father died in 1938. He had to stop studying to take up a post as a teacher in [Hommarting](#), a locality west of Henridorff, formerly under the abbeys of [Marmoutier](#) and [Wissembourg](#).

Then, war broke out. Following an attack carried out by school children, Freund was held hostage by the German army in his hometown. On November 11, he was detained in [Sarrebourg](#). The next night, he escaped. Together with a train-full of deportees, he was able to get to [Clermont-Ferrand](#) and join the displaced University of Strasbourg. While completing a bachelor's degree in philosophy, he became an activist in the [Liberation](#) movement of [Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie](#). Arrested in June 1942 at Clermont-Ferrand, then in September at Lyon, he was, along with [Emmanuel Mounier](#) (1905-1950), one of the defendants in the [Combat](#) trial. While incarcerated, he managed to escape from the [fortress of Sisteron](#) on June 8, 1944, joined a communist maquis and shared the struggle of the [FTP](#) in the Basses-Alpes and Drôme. He then discovered that the leader of the maquis was settling his personal accounts with a young woman who was his mistress, accusing her of "working for the Gestapo." The leader had the woman shot by his men, after a sham trial.

Freund was the only one defending the unfortunate woman. Rough schooling at twenty-three...

Back home, he devoted himself to politics, briefly enlisting in Moselle, under the banner of the Democratic and Socialist Union of the Resistance ([UDSR](#)). In June 1946, he resigned. He was preparing for his [agrégation](#) in philosophy, which he received in 1949, and was appointed high school teacher in Metz. He profusely read Aristotle (*Politics*, *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*). "[I was twenty-eight](#). It was a real eye-opener. I had broken out of representational idealism, and metaphysics mattered again." By way of Aristotle, he understood what dialectics was, holding that man is a political animal. He read Machiavelli, Hobbes and [Bodin](#). He discovered [Carl Schmitt](#), through one of his books found in the street. In April 1959, he met [Schmitt](#) in Colmar and asked him substantive questions. His interest in this German thinker, who had published in the Catholic review, [Hochland](#), in the 1920s, before joining the Hitler regime in 1933 from which he was dismissed in 1936, earned Freund derogatory criticism.

To overcome the disappointment born of his political commitments, Freund embarked on the preparation of a thesis which would become the source of his masterly book, [L'essence du politique](#) (*The Essence of the Political*). The first hundred pages of his project shocked the pacifism of [Jean Hyppolite](#) (1907-1968), a specialist in the works of Hegel and Marx, to the point that the latter indicated to Freund that he must find another thesis supervisor. Hyppolite, whose student Freund was in Strasbourg, was hugely complicit in academic Marxization, and who could not bear to read: "There is no politics except where there is an enemy." This was one of the teachings of Carl Schmitt that Freund retained. The same evening, Freund wrote to Raymond Aron (1905-1983) to ask him to make up for the defection of Hyppolite.

Freund defended his thesis on June 19, 1965 at the Sorbonne. The title was. *Essence et signification de la politique* (*The Essence and Meaning of Politics*). His thesis supervisor was Raymond Aron who had enthusiastically accepted. [Raymond Polin](#), [Pierre Grappin](#), [Paul Ricoeur](#) and Jean Hyppolite also sat on the jury. Aron [took the floor](#): "I would like to greet Mr. Freund, who will support this thesis which I find brilliant, but I would also like to underline the fact that he is a resistance member. That a resistance fighter could have done such a thesis is extraordinary. This is why I am asking you to stand in support of him."

As for politics, Freund provided a definition that he would use again in [L'essence du politique](#). In line with Aristotle, he maintained that his goal was not to build the kingdom of good feelings, but to work for the "common good" of political unity and to ensure its internal harmony and external security. He affirmed that "politics is an art" rather than a profession; it has little to do with "management," as a young Minister of Finance, [elected to the Presidency of the Republic](#) in May 1974, would have wanted. It comes under

"the art of decision." Politics involves, at the domestic level, the relationship between the private and the public. And, by its nature, it deals with "the dialectic between friend and foe" which governs foreign policy.

Freund supported the autonomy of politics, both economically and culturally. The categories of politics are, in the first place, the relation of command and obedience: it is the presupposition or condition of order that all politics aims to establish or guarantee. A point that he develops in particular in *Utopie et violence* (*Utopia and Violence*), where he asserts that "the primary purpose of politics is to regulate the exercise of violence... to compress it within limits which can only be transgressed in exceptional circumstances." Tough on the excesses of utopianism, Freund asserts that politics cannot be irenism, because it consists in "knowing how to envisage the worst in order to prevent it from happening."

We must not forget his regionalist profession of faith, [which says](#) that "the region is a territorial counter-power, whereas we always imagine counter-powers to be located in the center, in Paris. The region as a counter-power is a condition of civil liberty. In France we talk about decentralization. Unfortunately, that is still done by the center. Regionalization is another logic. Freedom is no longer simply the expression of a grant, but that of a freedom of people who live in a certain territory, in a certain tradition, Champagne, Breton, Alsatian or Provençal. These people must have institutions—under the conditions of the constitution—where they can express themselves differently."

Then followed a very active university life in Strasbourg. In 1965, he was elected professor of sociology at the University of Strasbourg, where he was the main founder and Director of the Faculty of Social Sciences. Then, he founded the Institut de polémologie de Strasbourg, in collaboration with [Gaston Bothoul](#) (1896-1980). After that, in 1967, came Centre de recherches et d'études en sciences sociales (the Center for Research and Studies in Social Sciences. Next, in 1972, he launched the *Revue des sciences sociales de la France de l'Est* (*Journal of Social Sciences in Eastern France*), followed by Centre de recherche en sociologie régionale (the Center for Research in Regional Sociology) in 1973. Freund taught at the [Collège d'Europe](#) in Bruges (from 1973 to 1975), then across the Atlantic at the University of Montreal (1975). All this time, he published a number of articles and books, which followed his *magnum opus* ([L'essence du politique](#)). He was deeply interested in [Georges Sorel](#) (1847-1923), the demystifier of "collective happiness," in [Vilfredo Pareto](#) (1848-1923), and [Georg Simmel](#) (1858-1918) who died in Strasbourg.

To devote himself to his books, Freund refused a post at an American university on the East Coast,

where Raymond Aron was chair. At the end of the 1970s, he took early retirement and settled in [Villé](#), a charming town which was once a Habsburg seigniory, and where he now rests. His wife, Marie France Kuder was born there. He had met her in [Gergovie](#) during the years of resistance. She was the daughter of the great Alsatian painter, [René Kuder](#) (1882-1962), who lived in Villé. To those who were surprised at his refusal to come and settle in Paris, he mischievously replied: "Kant lived in Königsberg and not in Berlin." He liked to go to the nearby forest to meditate. A Catholic, Freund reconnected with the faith of his ancestors after years of relapse which followed adolescence; he liked to meditate in silence. [Quest for](#) the vertical dimension: "Transcendence is that through which we come to God." Concern for transcendence was a strong constant in his life, and very rarely emphasized.

A great reader of the Russian [Lev Chestov](#) (1866-1938) and supporter of his negative theology, which he liked for its "insolence and impertinence," and as well an admirer of his book, [Athens and Jerusalem](#), Freund cursed the claims of scientism to erase metaphysics and religious faith. In his secret garden there was a figure of [Hildegard of Bingen](#) (1098-1179), who was loved by [Emperor Barbarossa](#) (1122-1190). Sensitive to art, Freund, the joyful pessimist loved Shakespeare (1616-1654), the evocator of the furies of the world.

A dedicated European, he was close to [Robert Schuman](#) (1886-1963) in the aftermath of the war. The fate of Europe was close to his heart. He was sorry for its refusal of power. His summary of Europe in *La Décadence* (*Decadence*) makes him the first historian on the subject of Europe. "Civilizations are mortal." He does not just quote Paul Valéry, he questions history, analyzes the facts. [He reminds](#) the indifferent: "Europe was the first world civilization. And there haven't been another since, and there cannot be any more, unless we find men two thousand or three thousand years from now. It was Europe that discovered all the lands of the wide world. It was not the Chinese who discovered Europe. It was Europe that discovered China. It was not the Americans or the Indians who discovered America and the Indies. And suddenly this Europe, which was present everywhere in the world, withdrew to its borders, in the space of fifteen to twenty years."

He thought that "Europe will be made militarily, or not be made. It's a matter of life and death. Anyone who is not ready to defend Europe militarily, I will go not go along with him, even if he also makes fine speeches." He noted that a suicidal Europe does not care about its demographics, which is "an indifference bordering on carelessness." Sharing the concerns of [Pierre Chaunu](#) (1923-2009), he emphasized that "The drop in birth rates is one of the signs of renouncing life, either to selfishly enjoy the present, or out of fear of the future. In this case, it is the expression of the refusal to defend the

values of the civilization to which one belongs." He also said: "Europe is not yet on the brink. There are therefore sufficient opportunities and potentials to affect a recovery, provided they are exploited in accordance with the traditional European spirit, educated by criticism. Indeed, the incomparable capacity for invention and creation which has always characterized European civilization is based on a critical spirit, ignored by other civilizations, and which is at ease both in analysis and in synthesis, and, thus, broken to overcome contradictions. The day the Europeans make the mistake of abdicating this critical ingenuity, they will also lose its political corollary, namely, the benefit of their freedoms. Then decadence will be truly consummated."

The evil that is eating away at Europe? For Freund, it resided "in irrational credulity in a possible going beyond faith." He argued: "All known civilizations, large or small, rudimentary or developed, have drawn their strength and duration from religion, whether animist, polytheist or monotheist. A civilization decays when the faith or beliefs that animate it die out."(11)

On September 10, 1993 in Colmar, Freund died prematurely, in his seventy-second year. For his funeral mass, he wished that the *Dies irae* be sung. At the time of his retirement, he vowed "to be able to contribute effectively to the renewal of metaphysical thought" On the eve of his death, he wondered about the consequences that the "shock wave" would have of the upheavals in Eastern Europe. He worried about the disorder of minds, the loss of meaning, the confusion born of impolitics, the ravages of scientism and economism. His *Essence de l'Economique* (*Essence of the Economic*), a book of precious reflections on a subject that remains very topical, reinforced by the thunderous discourse of the followers of "happy globalization" who criminalize identity ties, seeing the future only under the auspices of the leveling out of differences. Freund cursed "the illusions of progress;" and, once again, reminds us that Europe, which is disappearing, discovered the world.

Those who had the privilege of meeting him, safeguard the memory of a righteous man, generous with his time, anxious to share his convictions. A man of clear language, poles apart from the jugglers who now encumber the political field.

The article comes courtesy of L'Ami hebdo (L'Ami du peuple hebdo), the oldest journal in Alsace, France. Charles Haegen is a pseudonym, perhaps that of a monk who lives in the region of Strasbourg. (Translated from the French by N. Dass).

The featured image shows, "Aveugle au baton" ("Blind Man with Stick"), drawing by René Kuder, dated 1922.

