



# Introduction: The Politics of Moderation

*Ido de Haan and Matthijs Lok*

This book aims to delineate the tradition of political moderation. The urgency of such endeavour is evident in our times of a polarized and overheated political debate, in which opponents increasingly fail to find common ground. We live in a time when political debate often degenerates into a shouting match between opponents who are deaf to each other's arguments. In many ways, 'things fall apart; the centre cannot hold'.<sup>1</sup> The middle classes are under pressure, centrist political parties lose support, the middle ground increasingly becomes a no-man's land between camps entrenched in their own self-righteousness. All this stands in stark contrast with the tradition of political moderation, which for a long time has been considered a precondition for a secure and stable society, as a well as the bedrock of democratic institutions. The essays in this volume are inspired by the widely shared need for a more nuanced political discourse, and by the conviction that the history of modern

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politics offers a range of experiences and examples of the search for a middle way, which can help us to navigate through the tensions of the current political climate.

At the same time, the volume will offer a diagnosis of the problems and pitfalls of middling between extremes, and of the weaknesses of the moderate point of view. There is also a ‘dark’ side to the politics of moderation. The arguments of moderation and the related idea of the middle way were used to defend causes that are often found morally reprehensible, such as slavery, the defense of privilege based on birth, the veneration of the state, eurocentrism, radical Salafism and Nazi ideas of a ‘new European order’. The capability to be rational and moderate was and still is claimed to be a unique feature of white middle-aged men from the upper middle classes and assumed to be a legitimation for their monopoly of power. Political elites generally believed that people from low birth and common descent were incapable of controlling their passions and composure. Moreover, moderation has often been imposed by military victors on a defeated population under the threat of violent interference, as was the case in post-Napoleonic France and post-1945 Europe, or functioned as a tool of imperialist and colonial conquest.

Yet despite, or maybe even because of these evidently problematic contexts and conceptions of moderation, we believe that the tradition of political moderation contains important lessons for our contemporary world. We aim to explore the variety of attempts in modern European history to find a middle way between ideological extremes, from the *juste milieu* between old order and new liberty of the Restoration era, via the attempts to bridge the ideological divide between capitalism and socialism, the promise of the welfare state and the European project as way to escape the ideological warfare of the ‘short twentieth century’, to the current calls for a moderate Islam as a response to both fundamentalist and anti-Islamic extremism.

The approach presented in this book is part of a broader movement, both scholarly as well as among the general public, of people who seek to promote moderation as a political virtue, as a political practice and as an effect of sound public institution, without being blinded to the more pernicious aspects of the search for moderation. An example of the call for moderation came from the New York Times columnist David Brooks, who in 2017 published an article entitled ‘What moderates believe’, in which he urged the American progressives not to oppose the right-wing populist politics and person of president Donald Trump with an

equally populist politics of the ‘warriors of the Left’.<sup>2</sup> Instead, he called for moderation, as ‘a way of coping with the complexity of the world’, by embracing the plurality of the truth, the notion that politics is a limited activity, and incremental reform instead of sudden revolutionary change. In March 2018, Andrew Rawnsley argued in *The Guardian* that ‘populists will eventually be found out – moderates must be ready for that day’ because ‘the broad formula of the centre-left still has appeal to many millions of voters’.<sup>3</sup>

Also, elsewhere, a call for moderation can be heard. In 2016, a group of Utrecht humanities students started the initiative ‘Dare to be Grey’ to counter what they regarded as the increasing polarization in Dutch society, enthusiastically defending the right to be ‘grey’. As they wrote on their website: ‘fierce debates about immigration, racism and the place of minorities in our society have become an everyday reality. The Grey Middle Ground with all the countless personalities, world-views and nuances is being drowned out by the extremes’.<sup>4</sup> Also in the Netherlands, the journalist Fidan Ekiz published a ‘plea for the radical middle’ in reaction to what she perceived as the rise of extremism and social divisions.<sup>5</sup>

These are only a few scattered examples, and their scarcity is indicative of the fact that so far, the topic of moderation has received only limited attention from scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Radicalism and (violent) extremism have been the preferred topics for researchers in the field of politics and political history. While there are plenty of studies analysing the current radicalization and polarization of the political debate—notably in the context of populist politics—there is hardly any work that addresses the tradition of political moderation, which might offer a way out of this political predicament. One example is the recent study by Paul O. Carrese, *Democracy in Moderation: Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Sustainable Liberalism* (2016), in which he presents moderation as ‘a central concept for inquiry, and for civic self-definition and civic education, among free peoples’.<sup>6</sup> His work builds in many ways on the work of one of the few scholars who previously has explored this path, Aurelian Craiutu. In his study *A Virtue for Courageous Minds: Moderation in French Political Thought, 1748–1830* (2012) as well as his more recent work *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes* (2016), Craiutu argued that moderation is an independent intellectual tradition which can be traced back to the eighteenth century, if not to classical and biblical Antiquity.<sup>7</sup>

In this volume, this claim will be investigated by historians and social scientists who all explore how moderation and the politics of the middle way were conceptualized in different moments of modern history. Our aim in this book is to historicize the topic of moderation, not for its own sake, but as a way to answer a series of questions that the idea of moderation evokes. A first question is to what extent there is actually a tradition of political moderation, and if so, where it starts, and how it develops. How was moderation conceptualized in different situations and in different periods? This requires, first of all, an attempt at historical reconstruction, stemming from the intuition that the politics of moderation always has been part of modern politics, and does not need to be invented from scratch: it is a tradition that only needs to be revived. Such a historical reconstruction will also help to answer the question whether moderation is only the ad hoc response to specific circumstances or whether a veritable political tradition of moderation exists. A related issue is to what extent moderation can also be regarded as a global phenomenon. While Montesquieu for instance argued in his *Spirit of the Laws* of 1748, that moderation is a uniquely European quality that defines a ‘European civilisation’, the examples of moderation from the American context, but also the signs of an Islamic as well as a Confucian tradition of moderation, indicate it is applicable to other times and places as well.<sup>8</sup>

It is to be expected that, as every tradition, the tradition of political moderation is neither uniform nor fully coherent. There are recurrent tensions and contradictions that require further analysis. One issue to address is whether moderation consist of a compromise or middle way between substantive political values, or whether the middle way is a value in itself—a third way. If moderation is primarily a mode of politics, is it then a personal virtue, a practice, or a characteristic or effect of political institutions? And if it is a substantial political value, how is then the idea of a ‘radical middle’ or ‘centre’ defined in relation to its opposites like ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalism’, and how is it connected to notion like fairness, public reason, or prudence? Finally, a historical reconstruction of the tradition of political moderation will help to understand how the notion of moderation functions rhetorically. How is a call for moderation used to promote a certain point of view, or to legitimize political institutions or social relations? Is the politics of moderation itself actually a form of political moderation, or just another way to sell whatever point of view needs to be sold?

In addressing these topics we aim to cover the full variety of moderation within and beyond modern European history. Yet as always, reconstructing a phenomenon historically requires a middle way between acknowledging the diversity of its manifestation and the identification of a core that remains essentially the same over time, even if it is studied in its transformations. Next to these problems of conceptualization, we need to articulate by what method we think we can reconstruct the tradition of moderation. Finally, we will sketch how the contributions that follow help to delineate the contours of the tradition of political moderation in modern history.

### THE CONCEPT OF MODERATION

There are many ways to conceptualise moderation. The core of the debate on moderation is the question what it means to pursue the ‘golden mean’ (*aurea mediocritas*), which played a key role in political thought since ancient times. Is the precept to follow the middle way referring to a virtue or ideal that can or needs to be pursued in its own right, or is it a certain way to deal with a variety of substantive moral or political principles, while lacking an actual substance or content itself? Can one propose moderate principles in an immoderate, even violent way? And can one hold radical views in a moderate way? A concomitant question is whether moderation is an individual virtue or attitude, or whether it is a characteristic of institutions. Again, the two might conflict: can one be moderate even under extreme conditions, or does moderation presuppose a set of institutions that guarantee a middle way?

A good place to start this conceptual exploration is the Aristotelian notion that ‘in essence virtue is the observance of the mean’, yet that in confrontation with evil and malice ‘there can be no excess or deficiency in temperance and justice, because the mean is in a sense an extreme’.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle’s qualification of the mean as an extreme immediately points to one of the conceptual problems of moderation: is it an independent moral ideal, or only a way to manage the difference between mental states? If the former, are there immoderate ways to be moderate? And if the latter, isn’t moderation a form of spinelessness? With regard to the latter option, Aristotle argued that the identification of the mean depends on the extremes between which a middle way is followed: between fear and confidence it is courage; between pleasure and pain it is temperance; between giving and getting it is liberality; between honour

and dishonor it is greatness of the soul; between envy and malice it is righteous indignation, and so on.<sup>10</sup> This implies that moderation is to be understood in specific situations and contexts: no general ‘science’ of moderation is possible. Yet even if there is no universal theory of moderation, and while it can only be achieved through experience and practice, and applied through prudence, the attempt to find a middle way between substantial values nevertheless represents a definite ethics of courage, temperance, liberality, magnanimity and justice.

Aristotle also applied the principle of the middle way to politics, arguing that while ideally an aristocracy or the polis would be best, ‘a constitution possible for most states to attain’ would have to rely on the middle class between the rich and the poor. While the rich often tend towards insolence and pride, and the poor to malice and humility, it is only the middle class that can be expected to obey reason<sup>11</sup>: ‘It is therefore also that the political community administered by the middle class is the best, and that it is possible for those states to be well governed that are of the kind in which the middle class is numerous, and preferably stronger than both the other two classes, or at all events than one of them, for by throwing in its weight it sways the balance and prevents the opposite extremes from coming into existence’.<sup>12</sup> Based on this notion of a balance, Aristotle preferred a mixed constitution combining monarchical, aristocratic and popular elements.

The Aristotelian analysis points towards a variety of ways in which moderation as a political tradition can be reconstructed historically. A first way would be a history of a particular set of virtues. This would entail a sketch of the generations of virtuous leaders demonstrating exemplary moderation, or an analysis of a certain mode of doing politics that is commended as moderate, curbing not only malevolent and the ignorant but also tempering the enthusiastic and extraordinary political actors. The tradition of moderation can also be described as the social history of the relation between social groups, in particular as a history of the ‘middling classes’. But it can also be a history of political institutions, anchoring moderate behaviour in set of countervailing institutional powers. And finally, it can be written as the history of an ideology, defined by the attempt to strike a middle between, or to provide an alternative to, ideological extremes—as a third way. In order to sketch the context in which the contributors in this volume approach political moderation, we first explore these conceptual and theoretical dimensions a bit further.

### *Moderation as a Virtue*

As a virtue, moderation is often presented as an attribute of leaders, especially when confronted with extreme political tensions. As such it is a recurrent aspect in the genre of the *speculum principis* that had classical antecedents, yet in its own right first emerged in the early medieval period, with the chapters on the ‘unjust king’ in Pseudo-Cyprian’s *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* (7th c.). These reflections and the later writing which it influenced, emphasized the duty of a king to uphold religion and to fight sin, reflecting the Augustinian understanding of moderation as a way to thwart evil affections. In this it differed from late medieval and Renaissance mirrors of princes, inspired by Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch, like Giovanni da Viterbo’s *De regimine principatum* (1263) and the works of Brunetto Latini (*Livres dou trésor*, 1266), Giles of Rome (*De regimine principum*, 1277), and Francesco Petrarca’s letter to Francesco da Carrara (1373). In these works, rulers were admonished to follow justice, clemency, generosity, humility and temperance—all virtues connected to the Aristotelian notion of moderation—as a matter of political prudence.<sup>13</sup>

The virtue of moderation was deemed urgent especially in times of trouble. Notably the neo-stoic response to the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth century elevated moderation to the highest virtue. As one of the early protagonists of this position, Michel de Montaigne, explained in his *Essays*, the conflicts of his time could only be survived through constancy in the face of extreme tendencies. In this context, moderation was closely connected to tolerance, as a means to endure conflict and as a step towards a viable *modus vivendi* with one’s opponents.<sup>14</sup> In a similar way, Justus Lipsius called for moderation, not only as a virtue to withstand the vicissitudes of religious conflict, but also because immoderate forms of rule would be counter-productive: ‘Doest thou imagine to rule onely by force? thou art deceived [...]. Force that is not assisted with advise, of it owne selfe destroyeth itself [...]. Contrarily, God alwaies encreaseth moderate power’.<sup>15</sup>

This also brings an epistemological aspect of moderation as a virtue into play. A crucial element of the plea for moderation in religious conflicts is a fallibilist epistemology: since our knowledge is uncertain, prudence demands we moderate our judgment. Well-known is the position of Thomas Fuller, middling in the English Civil War between parliamentary Roundheads and High Royalist, who in *The Holy State and the*

*Profane State* (1642) argued that moderation ‘is a mixture of discretion and charity in one’s judgement’.<sup>16</sup> A similar line of thought is presented by Étienne Pascal, who argued that ‘our limited mental and physical powers are nothing but a reflection of our middling nature, equally incapable of absolute knowledge and complete ignorance’.<sup>17</sup> Such arguments were also made by Montaigne before him, and by John Locke after him: we need to tolerate differences of religious opinion, because there is no way for a civil authority to establish religious truth. Yet such moderation was also ‘radical’, not only because one had to be steadfastly moderate, in order to persevere in times of adversity, but also because religious doubt collided with orthodox opinion. The moderate call of Michel de l’Hospital and other advisors to the princes of early modern Europe to give priority to the *politique* considerations of the preservation of political power and social peace over ideological principles of religious truth, met with fierce oppositions from those who saw the *politiques* as nothing but treacherous and mendacious impersonations of Judas.<sup>18</sup>

These examples suggest that religious convictions are at odds with moderate virtues. But various contributions to this volume suggest that this is not necessarily the case. In his contribution, Arthur Ghins draws the attention to Germaine de Stael, who argued that Protestantism had to be seen as the moderate alternative to fanatical Catholicism. Even more ecumenical was Benjamin Constant, who aimed to strike a balance between the atheism of the philosophes and the fanaticism of ultra-Catholic thinkers, by proposing a religion of sentiment as a counterweight against fluctuations of opinion, the rise of commercial self-interest and the advent of moral heterogeneity. In this way, Constant was a precursor to Tocqueville, who saw in both Protestant and Catholic religion an antidote against individualism, materialism and scepticism, which all accompanied the advent of democracy. Such a religious defense of moderation is not limited to Christianity: it can also be found in Islam. As Robbert Woltering argues in his contribution to this volume, Islamic theology from the tenth century onwards acknowledged the principles of *bilā kayf* (refraining from asking how) and of *irjā* (leaving it to God to decide whether someone is Muslim or not) as ways to prevent intracomunal strife.

Despite these religiously inspired conceptions of moderation, the dominant tendency in modern history is to defend moderation in secular terms. An ethics of moderation was implied in the empiricist tradition from David Hume to Karl Popper, who opposed the fanaticism of



absolute certainty to the moderate judgment stemming from systematic scepticism and rational inquiry. Such claims to superior rationality were characteristic of the political elites of the middle of the nineteenth century identified in the contribution to this volume by Amerigo Caruso as the main social carriers of political moderation. In another contribution, Camilo Erlichman shows how in the twentieth century this claim transformed into an asset of a distinctive group of scientifically trained experts, who now asserted the role of social intermediaries in a new politics of moderation.

Moderation was not always considered to be a positive characteristic. Craiutu demonstrates this with the example of Halifax's discussion of the statesman as a 'trimmer', indicating not only a man who was versed in the art of compromise between opposing tendencies and able to disarm fanatics and bigots, but also as someone who stood aloof from a moral point of view, and was even to be considered a traitor.<sup>19</sup> The argument for moderation as a virtue also found its limits in Montaigne's precept to be moderate in moderation, but more importantly in Machiavelli's warning that princes should be willing to take radical, even violent measures to curb the ambitions of powerful contenders for power, even if that violence should be 'crudeltà bene usate', a measured form of violence.<sup>20</sup> Even more critical was François de la Rochefoucauld, who claimed that 'moderation is made a virtue to limit the ambition of the great; to console ordinary people for their small fortune and equally small ability'.<sup>21</sup>

These caveats reveal the two-sided nature of moderation as a virtue. As Ethan Shagan has argued with respect to the 'rule of moderation' in Tudor England,

arguments for moderation routinely incorporated attacks upon immoderate, excessive, immoral others. [...] Most importantly, moderation meant government, with no firm boundary between the ethical governance of the self and the political governance of others; it referred simultaneously to the internal restraint of wayward passions by reason and the external restraint of wayward subjects by authority.<sup>22</sup>

This double nature of moderation—taming the passions and controlling political opposition at the same time—is identified in this volume most clearly by Beatrice de Graaf, who does not hesitate to unmask the discourse of moderation as the 'cornerstone of an "imperial vernacular", and colonial principle to subjugate the world'.<sup>23</sup>

### *Moderation as a Sociological Category*

Beyond the analysis of moderation as an individual virtue—and potentially also vice—the Aristotelian analysis already pointed to a sociology of moderation, in which characteristics of the social structure guaranteed the maintenance of a balance of forces within society. There are two main understandings this sociological mechanism—a first focused on the agency of specific social groups, the other on a balance between social groups. In the *Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu had indicated that moderation was the soul of an aristocratic government, since it had to be in a way self-limiting for a lack of other restraints, but also because it was in the nature of an aristocracy to manifest such moderation.<sup>24</sup> Such notion of aristocracy, guided by ‘noblesse oblige’, became a recurrent element in the argument for a central political role for landed property, for a *régime censitaire* and for elite conceptions of democracy.<sup>25</sup> A specific brand of such theories was the argument presented by Arend Lijphart in defense of the Dutch consociational democracy, in which the centrifugal forces of competing religious and ideological groups were held in check by prudent elites following the precepts of depoliticized compromise.<sup>26</sup>

However, the role of a mediating force was more often ascribed to a middle class, which from the beginning of the nineteenth century came to be referred to as a ‘middling class’, able to balance between opposing forces in society.<sup>27</sup> In this guise, the middle class was seen as a precondition of a stable form of government. As Amerigo Caruso makes clear in his discussion of the mid-nineteenth century politics of moderation, the ambition to find the right middle—the *juste milieu*—was not only a characterization of an ideological position but also the self-declared political disposition of the European upper middle classes. Such arguments generally functioned to restrict the political participation of people deemed too immoderate to contribute to the common good. This was a standard argument for nineteenth-century conservative liberals but equally so in Cold War political science, presented in a most outspoken form by Seymour Lipset, who in *Political Man* (1959) argued that the ‘social situation of the lower strata, particularly in poorer countries with low levels of education, predisposes them to view politics as black and white, good and evil’ and ‘to prefer extremist movements which suggest easy and quick solutions to social problems and have a rigid outlook’.<sup>28</sup> As in the aristocratic variant of this argument, the middle class had specific virtues ascribed to it, such as ‘a high level of sophistication and ego

security' and the ability 'to understand the rationale underlying tolerance of those with whom he disagrees' and 'grasping or tolerating a gradualist image of political change'. These virtues the lower classes lacked, due to a lack of education or to social insecurity, but also as the result of a 'particular patterns of family life' with 'a great deal of direct frustration and aggression'.<sup>29</sup> As Corduener demonstrates in his contribution, such ideas informed the embrace of a restrained form of democracy after 1945.

The middling qualities of the middle class are generally considered to be arising from a civil society, again interpreted in two main strands. It was once more Montesquieu who played an innovative role, now as one of the proponents of the *doux commerce*-thesis: the idea of civil society as a market that enabled peaceful intercourse between individuals with a commercial interest, instead of religious difference or military antagonism.<sup>30</sup> This argument had a lasting impact, as becomes clear by the discussion in this volume by Ido de Haan and Hanco Jürgens of 'third way'-arguments in favor of a market economy. Yet another understanding, also emerging from Montesquieu's work, is that of the aristocracy as a *couche sociale* between monarch and the people, translated by Alexis de Tocqueville into voluntary associations as the functional equivalent of the aristocracy, protecting citizens from a tutelary state.<sup>31</sup> Based on this strand of thought, neo-Tocquevilleans from Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba to Robert Putnam have argued that a civic culture breeds civic-mindedness as a mixture between participatory and accommodating attitudes.<sup>32</sup>

Already these latter conceptions of a civil society as the breeding ground of political moderation point to a more interactive sociological understanding. The most common notion, already present in Aristotle, yet returning in a great variety of conceptions, is that of moderation as a result of the interaction between social groups, each holding the other in check. From this perspective, Machiavelli becomes a theorist of moderation as a dynamic balance between king, *grandi* and *popolo*, in which a coalition between the first and the third will hold the ambition of the *grandi* in check. It is on the basis of this idea that many authors after him have argued for a balance between social groups as a safeguard against abuse of power. It had a lasting influence on ideas of political pluralism, from John Stuart Mill to the pluralist theories of Robert Dahl.<sup>33</sup> Again, Montesquieu is a pivotal figure in this story, as he forges a shift, from a sociological understanding of a balance between the social actors as the representative of the monarchical, aristocratic

and democratic principle within a viable political community, to a functional and institutional interpretation of such balance in a separation of powers.<sup>34</sup>

### *Moderation in Institutions*

Montesquieu's discussion of the separation of powers was the continuation of an older institutional vision of moderation, based on a Ciceronian notion of a mixed regime. Like the harmony between musical instruments, or voices, Cicero argued, 'so too the state, through the reasoned balance of the highest and the lowest and the intervening orders, is harmonious in the concord of very different people. What musicians call harmony with regard to song is concord in the state, the tightest and the best bond of safety in every republic; and that concord can never exist without justice'.<sup>35</sup> While Cicero stressed the importance of harmony, *concordia ordinum*, in later accounts of a mixed regime this aspect became less prominent. Notably Machiavelli emphasized the conflictual relation between the monarchy, aristocracy and the people, thus transforming the tradition of the *regimen mixtum* into a discourse organized around the notion that 'power should be a check to power'.<sup>36</sup> The argument about the moderation of societal forces through the institution of countervailing powers had a lasting influence. It informed ideas about the *trias politica* and the arguments for an independent judiciary, as well as about parliamentary control over the executive power of the government. It also was part of the conception of bicameralism and of the importance of a senate as institutional form of the principle of aristocratic prudence.<sup>37</sup> As Beatrice de Graaf demonstrates in her contribution to this volume, the notion of moderation as a balance was even more important in the context of international relation: after 1815 new ideas on a 'balance of power' became a distinctively novel way of not just theorizing, but also putting into practice ideas about collective security.

Another notion of institutional moderation is that of a constitutional government, in which it is not the institutionalisation of opposing forces that functions as a restraint on the abuse of power, but the constitutional rules that bind the sovereign power. Such theories already emerge in the context of the reason of state in the course of the sixteenth century. At first sight, it may appear contradictory to interpret the theories of Giovanni Botero and other protagonists of the reason of state as expressions of political moderation, since they imply that the prince

had an unlimited power to preserve his dominion. But as Maurizio Viroli argues, quoting Scipione Ammirato, reason of state meant ‘the derogation of ordinary law for the public good, that is to say, on behalf of a higher and more universal norm’. The prince was bound by the laws of god and nature, even if he was its only interpreter at the exclusion of all others. Moreover, exercising these powers required prudence, which included the observance of justice and proportionality.<sup>38</sup> Such constitutional limitations on power are also part of the tradition of modern natural law and social contract theories, in which the sovereign power is held in the check by the principles laid down in the constitution of the realm. As Locke argued, ‘the first and fundamental natural Law, which is to govern even the Legislative itself, is the preservation of the society, and (as far as will consist with the publick good) of every person in it’—thus formulating a constitutional principle of limited government that up until today is a crucial aspect of political moderation.<sup>39</sup>

Most of these theories are evolving from a consideration how to limit the power of monarchs. Yet the institution of the monarchy, irrespective of the actual virtues of a specific king, was sometimes also seen as safeguard of moderation. Notably in the first phase of the French Revolution, there was widespread support for a constitutional monarchy and for a royal veto as a third power to balance between the other two powers. In his contribution, Matthijs Lok draws attention to the French counter-revolutionary conservative Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, who proposed a ‘wisely tempered monarchy’ after the example of Henri IV, as the best guarantee for a just and stable government. A later variant of this line of thought was presented by Benjamin Constant, who argued in favor of the monarchy as a neutral power, rising above the parties, and due to its independence able to adjudicate between contending parties.<sup>40</sup>

The justification of such neutral instance was strictly functional—any independent instance would do—and fitted seamlessly in an argument in favor of a strengthened executive power. As Lok demonstrates with reference to Pasquier and the German statesman and historian Leopold von Ranke, and as René Koekoek emphasize in his analysis of the Atlantic debate on the dangers of clubs and popular societies, a centralized and unitary government came to be seen as the best means to secure a moderate form of politics. Yet these contributions also make clear that a plea for a strong executive power as a guarantee for moderate rule was vulnerable to the counterargument that such a neutral power was in fact partial. It invited additional arguments for the neutrality of the executive,

from the claim of the emergent civil service that its bureaucratic ethos guaranteed its neutrality among political parties to the idea—analysed in this volume by Camilo Erlichman—that scientific knowledge allowed experts to rule *sine ira et studio*.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, both Koekkoek and Corduwener make clear for the very different periods of the post-Revolutionary and post-war Europe, that the desire for moderation out of a fear of faction and political extremism, led to a stifling of the political debate, and a numbing of political passion, which severely undermined the commitment of citizens.

### *Moderation as an Ideology*

Finally, moderation is not only a mode of rule, but often also a substantial political point of view that is forced upon opponents, who are denied legitimacy or rationality by accusing them of immoderate behaviour. The construction of such an ideology of moderation requires on the hand the claim to supersede the positions of one's opponent, but at the same time to forge a position that is more than just a middle way between extremes. In this sense, it resembles a Hegelian notion of a dialectical reconciliation of opposites on a higher level of synthesis. At the same time, it draws the discussion of moderation into the realm of ideology, and thus into the modern history of the nineteenth and twentieth century. As such, moderation can be seen as the ideology of a 'third way' between the big ideological contenders of the age. As Amerigo Caruso indicates in his contribution, all over Europe the politics of the middle of the nineteenth century came to be defined by the attempt to find a *juste milieu* between Revolution and the restoration of the *ancien régime*, and between the left and right of the parliamentary state of the later nineteenth century. Yet as Ido de Haan suggests in his contribution, from the end of the nineteenth century, the search for a middle way began to chart a different terrain, no longer defined by issues of a political constitution, but by capitalist and socialist conceptions of a social and economic order, and by an ideological battle between economic liberalism and social democracy.

As becomes clear from the contribution of Daniël Knegt, 'third ways' can be a quite radical, like the 'revolution of the centre', proclaimed by the French Fascist, who were positioned as 'ni gauche, ni droite'.<sup>42</sup> A similarly radical 'third way', discussed by Ido de Haan, was claimed by the German Ordoliberal Wilhelm Röpke, who had argued he 'sided

with the socialists in their rejection of capitalism and with the adherents of capitalism in their rejection of socialism'.<sup>43</sup> Yet as Hanco Jürgens demonstrates in his discussion of the Third way proposed by the German prime-minister Tony Blair and the German chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the end of the twentieth century, the suggestion to forge an 'end of ideology' was itself generally highly ideological. As such, any claim to moderation needs to be studied in its political context, not just as a certain mode to do politics, but also as a political ideology.

### APPROACH: IDEAS AND PRACTICES

The approach to the problem of moderation in this volume is premised on the idea that moderation as a political tradition can only be studied at the intersection of intellectual, political, legal, cultural, social and administrative history. This volume thus explicitly aims to go beyond a mere history of ideas. The topic of moderation will be firmly situated in its social, political and cultural context. Not just ideas will be examined, but also the practice and rhetoric of moderation in state policies, institutions, laws and social groups.

In order to study the notion of moderation in these various contexts over a longer period of time requires a methodology of what David Armitage calls 'serial contextualism': the 'reconstruction of a sequence of distinct contexts in which identifiable agents strategically deployed existing languages to effect definable goals such as legitimation and de-legitimation, persuasion and dissuasion, consensus-building and radical innovation, for instance'.<sup>44</sup> Such an approach avoids the danger of unilinearity, which the notion of a tradition might suggest: even if the modern history of political moderation unfolds in consecutive episodes, the tradition of political moderation consists of irreconcilable and contradicting parts. Moreover, serial contextualism is a solution to the problem that a complete diachronic overview of the history of moderation is practically and perhaps also in principle impossible, by presenting specific episodes of contestation over the meaning of moderation as the stepping-stones in a diachronic narrative, extending over decades, if not centuries. In this volume, we have made a rough distinction between the nineteenth century, dominated by the attempt to find the *juste milieu* between the constitutional principles of the *ancien régime*, the Revolution and the Napoleonic era; and the twentieth century, in which the search for moderation required to navigate between the ideologies of social and

economic order—liberalism and socialism—and to manage the dangers of mass democracy. Moreover, we focus on periods of fundamental transition—the Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848; the Napoleonic wars, the First and Second World War, the Cold War—and their aftermaths, as pivotal moments when moderation is invoked as a way out of the predicaments of the age, and as episodes when the meaning and relevance of moderation is highly contested.

The intellectual and conceptual context of the history of moderation is addressed in this volume by an analysis of the precise wording and the language of moderation.<sup>45</sup> What words were used to determine moderation and its counterparts? Changing as well as continuous use of certain concepts will be followed throughout the volume. The concept of moderation is located within a semantic field of related notions, like the *via media*, the ‘golden mean’, the *juste milieu*, the ‘third way’ and the ‘radical centre’. Its contours are delineated by reference to contrasting concepts, such as radicalism, faction, fanaticism and extremism. And its content is specified by adjacent notions like balance, limitation, restraint, prudence and rationality. Yet we also want to follow the suggestion of conceptual and intellectual historians, from Quentin Skinner to David Armitage, that concepts need to be understood in their discursive and pragmatic contexts. The question of who is a ‘moderate’ and who can be termed a ‘radical’ is also determined by specific actors with specific agendas interacting in various and changing social and political contexts. ‘Radical’ or ‘extremist’ and ‘moderate’, and their equivalents in different periods and languages, are of course not neutral descriptions, but rhetoric devices that can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the circumstances, as a result of which modesty was seen as a virtue, yet ‘moderantism’ as a vice.<sup>46</sup>

One important aspect to address will therefore be the relation between moderation and power. Most importantly, moderation is seen as a virtue or an idea, or as an effect of institutional or social circumstances, which is able to restrain, limit, or suppress radical, extreme, or violent political passions. Depending on the urgency of the attempts to thwart fanaticism, such moderation can be put to practice in modest or militant ways. Therefore, moderation is itself a powerful means to attain power for a certain group as well as to exclude and persecute other groups. During the French Revolution, moderation was vilified by revolutionaries and counter-revolutionary alike, but also claimed by others.<sup>47</sup> The language of moderation was a weapon against fanatical clubs,



as becomes clear from Koekkoek's analysis of revolutionary discourse. It was also a barrier against aspiring citizens and political opponents, as becomes clear in Caruso's reconstruction of *juste milieu* ideology, or Corduwener's discussions of the post-war defence of restrained democracy. It was a tool of power, as Beatrice de Graaf demonstrates by an analysis of the Council of Allied powers in 1815–1818, or Erlichman in his explanation of the rule of experts in post-war Germany. But talk of the middle or third way was also a means to criticize and marginalize political opponents, to mobilize a movement or to campaign for electoral support.

Another important dimension is the place of moderation in modern European institutional history. In periods of political and religious polarization, state sovereignty was often presented as the solution to ideological warfare. During the sixteenth-century religious wars, in the Napoleonic era as well as in the twentieth-century post-war era, the state was presented as a moderating institution that transcended the warring factions. In many cases, the language of moderation served to increase state power.<sup>48</sup> As Lok demonstrates, nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke regarded the Prussian state as the synthesis and embodiment of a moderate third way between radical conservative as well as liberal ideologies. Also today, the business of a well-ordered and efficient technocracy of state officials is often seen as a non-ideological alternative to ideological polarization.

Finally, the modern history of political moderation is a transnational phenomenon. First of all, the politics of moderation emerges as a response to social and political transformation that affect Europe as whole—revolution, war, social conflict. Moreover, as demonstrated by De Graaf and Lok, it informs various conceptions of a European order, interpreted as a balance of power, or as a bulwark against the Revolution. But as Koekkoek, Caruso, De Haan, Knegt, Corduwener and Jürgens indicate, it also informs movements and ideologies that have no natural national border, such as the European-wide notion of the *juste milieu*, restrained democracy and the third way. The language of moderation travelled beyond borders and was spread by exiles, as becomes clear from the correspondence between the British member of parliament Edmund Burke and the French exile Charles-Alexandre de Calonne in the 1790s. Its transnational character is also evident from the interaction between political moderation and religious convictions without a clear territorial foundation. And as becomes clear from

both Woltering and the American perspective of Aurelian Craiutu and Sheldon Gellar, the politics of moderation isn't an exclusively European phenomenon.

However, despite this clearly transnational character of the history of political moderation, there is a persistent nationalist element as well. In nineteenth-century United Kingdom, Prussia and the Netherlands, moderation was regarded as part of the quintessential national self-image and formed the basis of feelings of national superiority vis-à-vis other nations, notably the French. Yet also in France moderation was a means of distinction in its relation to even more Mediterranean people. As the moderate French statesman Étienne-Denis Pasquier argued: 'There is in the customs and character of the southern peoples a certain fund of ferocity, over which civilization triumphs with difficulty, and which manifests itself in violent acts, whenever the passions of the masses are excited'.<sup>49</sup> Similar arguments of superior modesty play a role in legitimations of colonial rule.

## THE CONTOURS OF POLITICAL MODERATION

In this volume, the history of political moderation is studied diachronically, but it is debatable whether there is actually a long-term tradition of political moderation. As the authors of the various contribution make clear, there is at least a recurrent pattern of moderate responses to political turmoil and tension, suggesting that invocations of political moderation are more than an ad hoc reaction to specific circumstances.

As the first element of this recurrent pattern, moderation is at the heart of a call for moral fortitude and equanimity in the face of radical disagreement. Aurelian Craiutu and Sheldon Gellar make this explicit in the final chapter of this volume, in which they argue that moderation entails civic pragmatism capable of dealing with inequalities and injustice; it enables us to balance and redress the imbalances in society; and it spans across religions and moral traditions. As such, moderation is a virtue of 'epistemic modesty', which is simultaneously necessary in light of the overwhelming historical experience; limited in scope, as it cannot replace more outspoken opinions; and difficult to practice because it requires judgment and lacks a precise algorithm or manual that could teach it to those willing to learn.

Several of the authors in this volume have demonstrated that such a moderate ethics emerged first of all in the context of religious conflict.

Reminiscent of the pleas for moderation from moderate Catholics in the face of the challenges of the Reformation, Arthur Ghins draws the attention to the nineteenth-century French liberal Benjamin Constant, who aimed to strike a balance between the atheism of the philosophes and the fanaticism of ultra-Catholic thinkers, by proposing a religion of sentiment as a counterweight against fluctuations of opinion, the rise of commercial self-interest and the advent of moral heterogeneity. A similar religiously inspired call for moderate virtues is discussed by Robbert Woltering, who demonstrates how moderation is a distinct intellectual category of social and political thought with a long and distinguished pedigree in classical Islamic history, political theory, key aspects of Sunni theology and the practice of Islamic law. While the prominence of the concept of moderation in the Muslim world has been obscured by binary categories of *halal* (allowed) and *haram* (forbidden), there is a counter-tendency of *wasāṭiyya* (moderation).

Other contributions to this volume shed light on a second dimension of the recurrent pattern of political moderation. As a continuation of the reason of state-argument in the face of the political and religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, René Koekkoek demonstrates how the political extremism and factionalism of the revolutionary era inspired American Federalists, French Thermidorians and Dutch Batavian revolutionaries to discredit popular societies as the embodiment of faction and party spirit, and to aim at the institutionalization of moderation by strengthening the ultimate authority of representative government and the underlying principle of an undivided citizenry. Matthijs Lok argues that Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, Etienne-Denis Pasquier and Leopold von Ranke, despite their differences, all shared the idea that a strong state is the solution to a polarized political climate. Similarly, Beatrice de Graaf argues that new ideas on a ‘balance of power’ were a very distinctively novel way of not just theorizing, but also putting into practice ideas on collective security after 1815. This principle of moderation was to calm down the tide of evil passions and revolutions, but also an instrument to secure the highly asymmetrical division of power in the international arena. Such institutional approaches to moderation return at the end of the Second World War. Camilo Erlichman demonstrates how the collapse of effective central state authority and the breakdown of mass parliamentary politics allowed for the emergence of a range of influential expert groups operating beneath the level of the formal political process.

They played a pivotal role in the top-down reconfiguration of politics, in which experts advanced discourses and practices of political moderation that were integral to the post-war model of democracy. In a similar vein, Pepijn Corduwener underlines how, after the dramatic experiences with mass democracy in the Interwar era, politicians drew the lesson that democracy was about the protection of individual liberties and the rule of parties, parliaments and politicians—rather than a program of social equality or popular sovereignty.

These recurrent moral and institutional patterns suggest that under certain, specifiable circumstances, political moderation emerged as a viable solution to deep-seated cultural and political conflict. As such, the phenomenon of political moderation is not limited to European history, or to a Christian culture: it can emerge across time and place, and in the context of a wide variety of cultures. Yet in order to interpret such recurrent patterns as elements of a tradition, some mechanism of historical transmission needs to be identified. There are indications that such mechanism actually exists, primarily in a transfer of a cultural and institutional memory. In the post-revolutionary period, the memory of sixteenth-century religious wars was activated as part of the attempts to achieve moderation.<sup>50</sup> After the First and Second World War, the remembrance of the post-Napoleonic era re-emerged as source of inspiration. And as becomes clear from the contributions of De Haan, Knegt and Jürgens to this volume, there is an apparent ideological continuity across the twentieth century of the third way. Moreover, the institutional and political history of Europe, and the philosophical reflection on its uses and abuses—from *regimen mixtum* to the *trias politica* and multi-party democracy; from the *via media* to the third way—contain a fund of intellectual inspiration and practical emulation for a politics of moderation.

The tradition of political moderation—as a string of experiences, practices and ideas—might also be interpreted as a discourse, as a cultural code, or as an ideology—there are various ways to express the notion of authoritative interpretations and rules regulating the actions of an identifiable social group and its individual members. Seen from this ideological perspective, political moderation is more than a mode to handle substantive political values. The contributions to this volume make clear that even when political moderation advises to find a middle way between political extremes, it emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth century as the middle road between distinct, yet variable

political positions—in shorthand: as *juste milieu* and third way. In its first manifestation, politically moderates like François Guizot and John Stuart Mill supported the cause of civil liberty, representative government and free trade. After 1870, the middle of the road branched off into the economic realm, where proponents of the third way strike a middle between *laissez faire* and socialist planning. Characteristic of both strands of political moderation is a strong reliance on the executive power of the state, and a distrust of popular sovereignty. Also in this regard, it is the expression of substantive political values, shared by an identifiable social group: while the proponents of the *juste milieu* adhere to the sovereignty of reason, exemplified by the educated male members of the middle class, the third way was generally represented by professional experts.

Despite its respectable ancestry and attractive perspective of a peaceful society, governed on the basis of reasonable political principles, the exposure of the ideological nature of the tradition of political moderation reveals its potentially fatal flaws. Its elitism is vulnerable to a democratic critique in the name of popular sovereignty, while its enthusiasm for executive power and reason of state is hard to digest for the defenders of political liberty and the rule of law. In the face of a political climate in which strongly held opinions, expressed in the name of the people, are contrasted to the claims to reasonable objectivity of an elite with liberal access to the state, the call for political moderation is easily discarded as an expression of political hypocrisy—not as an appeal to moderation, but as an immodest claim to power. At the same time, this kind of scepticism might be at the heart of the ethos of moderation. As Craiutu and Gellar argue at the end of their contribution, political moderation calls for an art of civil disagreements, allowing for the possibility that there is some truth in the opponent’s view.

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