



The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century

Tony Judt

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Using the lives of the three outstanding French intellectuals of the twentieth century, renowned historian Tony Judt offers a unique look at how intellectuals can ignore political pressures and demonstrate a heroic commitment to personal integrity and moral responsibility unfettered by the difficult political exigencies of their time.

Through the prism of the lives of Leon Blum, Albert Camus, and Raymond Aron, Judt examines pivotal issues in the history of contemporary French society—antisemitism and the dilemma of Jewish identity, political and moral idealism in public life, the Marxist moment in French thought, the traumas of decolonization, the disaffection of the intelligentsia, and the insidious quarrels rending Right and Left. Judt focuses particularly on Blum's leadership of the Popular Front and his stern defiance of the Vichy governments, on Camus's part in the Resistance and Algerian War, and on Aron's cultural commentary and opposition to the facile acceptance by many French intellectuals of communism's utopian promise. Severely maligned by powerful critics and rivals, each of these exemplary figures stood fast in their principles and eventually won some measure of personal and public redemption.

Judt constructs a compelling portrait of modern French intellectual life and politics. He challenges the conventional account of the role of intellectuals precisely because they mattered in France, because they could shape public opinion and influence policy. In Blum, Camus, and Aron, Judt finds three very different men who did not simply play the role, but evinced a courage and a responsibility in public life that far outshone their contemporaries.

"An eloquent and instructive study of intellectual courage in the face of what the author persuasively describes as intellectual irresponsibility."—Richard Bernstein, *New York Times*

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