

De Gaulle, Moravcsik, and Europe

❖ Marc Trachtenberg

In “De Gaulle Between Grain and *Grandeur*,” Andrew Moravcsik challenges the conventional interpretation of Charles de Gaulle’s policy on European integration. Practically everyone who has written on the subject, he points out, explains de Gaulle’s policy in primarily geopolitical terms, but Moravcsik disagrees. De Gaulle’s policy toward the European Economic Community (EEC), he argues, was rooted in more mundane considerations: Economic interests, especially French agricultural interests, were fundamental, and de Gaulle’s distinct geopolitical vision played a “secondary, largely insignificant, role.”¹ If true, this would be a very important finding for reasons Moravcsik makes clear toward the end of his article. But is his central thesis correct?

My own assumption before I read this article was that de Gaulle’s basic political vision *had* to be connected to his policy on the EEC. One of de Gaulle’s fundamental goals was to create a “European Europe”—that is, a Europe with a political personality of its own, independent of the United States. I simply assumed that this goal must have had a lot to do with his policy on the EEC, and that de Gaulle took it for granted that the EEC was a base on which a European political union would eventually be built. But this, of course, was just an assumption—it did not derive from careful study of the empirical evidence—and Moravcsik is perfectly correct to insist that the validity of that interpretation (and of his counterinterpretation) turns on the adequacy of the evidence supporting it.

So I want to get at the issue of whether his thesis here is valid by examining his argument in light of the evidence, especially the evidence he himself presents. Fortunately, the structure of that argument is wonderfully clear:

1. Andrew Moravcsik, “De Gaulle Between Grain and *Grandeur*: The Political Economy of French EC Policy, 1958–1970 (Part 1),” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 2000), p. 6. All subsequent references to Moravcsik’s article will be followed by part and page numbers in parentheses.

Moravcsik does not leave you in any doubt as to where he stands on an issue, and it is very easy to see how he goes about proving his points. The discussion here, therefore, will be quite similar in structure to Moravcsik's own article, although I will change the order slightly. I will deal first with the section on "Accepting and Completing the Customs Union," then with the sections on the Fouchet Plan and the "empty chair" crisis, and finally with the section on British membership in the EEC.

Moravcsik's first case has to do with de Gaulle's decision to support the EEC. This policy, he argues, was not rooted in a grand geopolitical vision; instead, the policy is to be explained essentially in terms of French commercial, and above all, agricultural, interests. In fact, he says, if de Gaulle's geopolitical vision had been the central determinant of policy, he would not have accepted the Common Market: The supranational philosophy reflected in the Rome Treaties cut against the grain of his basic nationalistic approach to foreign policy. The fact that the Fifth Republic, like the Fourth, embraced the EEC thus suggests that geopolitics was not central and that instead French economic interests, which did not change with the change in regime, must have played the fundamental role in shaping policy. This basic claim is supported, he argues, by an analysis of de Gaulle's public and private statements on these issues at the time and after, and also by an analysis of de Gaulle's actual behavior, especially his repeated threats to pull out of the EEC if France's partners were unwilling to accept the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

What is to be made of these arguments? What is to be made, first of all, of the argument about the continuity of French policy following de Gaulle's return to power? It is not to be assumed that de Gaulle's geopolitical vision amounted simply to a defense of the nation-state and a consequent opposition to supranational institutions. That was of course important, but there was another side to his policy that pulled in the opposite direction as far as the EEC was concerned. One of de Gaulle's key aims, as he often said, was to create an independent Europe. The EEC could reasonably be understood as a means to this end. Hence, the fact that de Gaulle supported the EEC does not in itself prove that "geopolitics" was not a fundamental factor shaping his policy on the Common Market. He may well have supported it because his goal of creating a "European Europe" was even more important than his opposition to supranational institutions.

But Moravcsik in effect takes issue with this assumption and denies that de Gaulle thought of the EEC in political terms. There is little evidence, he says, that links the EEC "to de Gaulle's geopolitical vision" (Part 1, p. 7). An analysis of the "discourse of de Gaulle and top French decision makers" instead shows that economic considerations were fundamental: "Commercial and above all agricultural concerns, far more than geopolitical objectives,

dominate de Gaulle's memoirs, interviews, cabinet sessions, and discussions about the EEC during this period" (Part 1, p. 23). He goes on to cite a number of sources, including a passage from de Gaulle's own memoirs, that do indeed suggest that agricultural considerations were the fundamental factor that led him to accept the EEC.

My own reading of the evidence, however, is somewhat different. Consider, for example, what Moravcsik says was the one piece of evidence he could find to support the geopolitical interpretation, a passage from de Gaulle's memoirs (Part 1, p. 26). In the section Moravcsik quotes from that passage, de Gaulle says directly that his "policy aimed at the setting up of a concert of European States" and that "this led us to put the European Economic Community into effect." Moravcsik minimizes the importance of this passage, but it struck me as rather straightforward. Moreover, this statement is not as atypical as Moravcsik implies. De Gaulle, for example, makes similar points elsewhere in his memoirs.²

But memoirs have only limited value as historical evidence. Going beyond de Gaulle's memoirs, what do the sources show? My sense is that French leaders, from de Gaulle on down, took it for granted that political and economic issues were closely interconnected. The Common Market, in their view, had fundamental political meaning and was not just an economic construct. Developing the EEC was a way of "building Europe" and making it into something of a political entity. The idea was that the Common Market was a way station on the road to a real political union. One finds this point of view reflected in many documents from the period. The French foreign minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, for example, noted in 1959 that "economic cooperation must develop into political cooperation," and in de Gaulle's own statements the economic and political sides of this process were very commonly linked to each other.³

2. Note, for example, the reference to "l'ébauche d'union que représente le Marché commun" and the structure of the sentence on the subject in the penultimate paragraph of the book, which begins by listing a series of preeminently political goals and then goes on to discuss the policy designed to achieve those goals, one aspect of which had to do with the building of the "Common Market of the Six." Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir: le renouveau* (Paris: Plon, 1970), pp. 230, 313.

3. Couve quoted in Maurice Vaïsse, *La grandeur: politique étrangère du général de Gaulle* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), p. 177. See also the following extracts from de Gaulle's statements on the subject in 1962 alone: Edmond Jouve, *Le général de Gaulle et la construction de l'Europe (1940-1966)*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1967), extracts 190(3, 4), 193(1, 2), 195-198, 199(2), 203(2), 205(1), 208(1), 212(4) and 219(3), on pp. 264-280. There are a number of passages in recently published volumes of French diplomatic documents that point in the same direction. See, for example, *Documents diplomatiques français* (hereinafter *DDF*), 1961, Vol. 2, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998), pp. 645-646, and esp. pp. 705-706 (where de Gaulle, in a discussion with Adenauer of the agricultural issue, says "mais la question est politique, comme d'ailleurs l'ensemble du Marché Commun").

In fact, it is hard to imagine how de Gaulle could have been more explicit about these matters. Moravcsik disagrees with Maurice Vaïsse's conclusion that for de Gaulle "the economic success of the Europe of the Six was not an end in itself" (Vaïsse, quoted in Part 1, p. 12). But it was de Gaulle himself who made this point—the General used this very phrase—and the evidence comes from a source Moravcsik takes as gospel, Alain Peyrefitte's diary. De Gaulle, Peyrefitte noted, had repeatedly emphasized that "the EEC needed to become a '*political* Community.'" Peyrefitte asked de Gaulle whether this was really his intention. "Of course!" de Gaulle replied. "This is absolutely essential! The European Economic Community is not an end in itself. It must transform itself into a political community!"⁴

But here I am simply giving counterevidence. What about the positive evidence Moravcsik cites to support his thesis? He says that de Gaulle repeatedly admitted in private that "ostensibly geopolitical matters" were in fact "driven by commercial concerns" and refers specifically to Franco-West German and Franco-American relations (Part 1, p. 24–25). Again, my reading of the evidence he cites is a little different from his. Yes, de Gaulle did say it was essential that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) accept the CAP, but he was not saying that the agricultural issue was the heart of the Franco-West German relationship. What de Gaulle was saying, as I read the passage Moravcsik cites, is that the agricultural problem was the "core difficulty" in the *economic* negotiations at Brussels, not that it was the dominant element in the Franco-West German relationship. Similarly, I think Moravcsik misinterprets an exchange between Couve de Murville and de Gaulle in October 1964. Moravcsik writes: "Why is there a Franco-American conflict, the Foreign Minister asks in 1964. De Gaulle replies: 'We are both agricultural producers. It all boils down to that.'" But here is the actual exchange, as Peyrefitte recorded it:

Couve: The conflict at GATT between the Common Market and the United States has to do only with the agricultural part of the negotiation. It's an open and well-defined conflict between France and the United States.

De Gaulle: Both of whom are agricultural producers. It all boils down to that.⁵

De Gaulle and Couve were referring simply to a trade conflict; the actual quotation does not show that a fundamental geopolitical relationship—in this

4. Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Fayard, 1994), p. 429; emphasis in original. Moravcsik cites this passage in Part 2, p. 27.

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 265.

case, France's conflict with the United States—was “driven” by commercial concerns (Part 1, p. 25). Moravcsik is clearly pushing his argument too far.

Still, the basic argument in this section is not to be dismissed out of hand. Moravcsik does make one strong argument. He points out that de Gaulle repeatedly threatened to pull out of the EEC if he did not get his way on the CAP, and that this implied that for de Gaulle French agricultural interests were more important than “building Europe” for geopolitical reasons (Part 1, pp. 31–32). This point is perhaps not quite as strong as Moravcsik suggests. De Gaulle calculated that West Germany had a greater political interest in “building Europe” than France had, and that West Germany would therefore accommodate French wishes on the CAP rather than see the EEC collapse. This would in effect allow France to have its cake and eat it too. Indeed, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer had virtually assured de Gaulle in advance that this would be the case.⁶ A tough line on the CAP would therefore not really endanger the policy of “building Europe.” But still, the fact that de Gaulle repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the EEC if France did not get its way on the CAP does provide a measure of support for Moravcsik's thesis: It does show that agricultural considerations were a major factor shaping de Gaulle's policy.

Let me turn now to Moravcsik's discussion of the Fouchet Plan and the “empty chair” crisis. What exactly is the point of his section on the Fouchet Plan? That de Gaulle was not serious about the policy embodied in the plan? Some of what Moravcsik says in this section—his claim that the plan was a “deliberate deception” (Part 1, p. 37) and that de Gaulle did not seem particularly interested in bringing about the success of the plan—does indeed suggest that de Gaulle was not serious about the project. But elsewhere in the article, Moravcsik seems to recognize that de Gaulle was serious. Bringing about a Fouchet Plan-type arrangement, he says, was “de Gaulle's ideal goal”; this was in fact the “lodestar of his policy toward the Community” from 1960 on (Part 2, pp. 46, 48). At another point, Moravcsik seems to admit that “de Gaulle's . . . geopolitical vision” had a good deal to do with France's general European policy; he denies only that it played a key role in shaping policy on the Common Market (Part 1, p. 6). This problem aside, the real question here has to do with how well the material Moravcsik presents in this section relates to his basic thesis in the article—that is, whether the arguments presented here really show that French policy on the EEC was rooted essentially in commercial concerns.

6. See de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir: le renouveau*, pp. 188–189, 195.

One of the arguments Moravcsik makes in this section is that de Gaulle did not threaten to break up the EEC if he did not get his way on the Fouchet Plan (Part 1, p. 35). But this is not a valid test of de Gaulle's seriousness on the issue. It would have been absurd to force France's partners to accept a plan for European cooperation by making threats of that sort. Moreover, even if one accepts Moravcsik's argument on this point, all it shows is that de Gaulle was not serious about the Fouchet Plan, not that his policy toward the EEC was rooted in commercial interest.

Moravcsik might interject at this point that if the plan is not to be taken at face value—that is, as reflecting de Gaulle's basic political concept—then it has to be understood in instrumental terms as a policy aimed at achieving goals of an entirely different sort. Moravcsik explicitly argues that de Gaulle tended to soft-pedal his political vision for Europe until he got what he wanted from his Common Market partners on agricultural policy in January 1962, and that only then did his policy harden (Part 1, p. 41). Again, this may be true (although my view is that Moravcsik underestimates the importance of what was going on in the political sphere, especially on the Berlin issue, in late 1961 and early 1962), but does it really mean that de Gaulle's policy on the Fouchet Plan was driven by agricultural concerns? De Gaulle might have drawn in his horns a bit to avoid antagonizing his partners, and this may have had to do with the fact that he had not yet achieved what he wanted on agricultural questions. But this merely proves that he could be flexible in his tactics, not that his political vision did not play a major role in shaping his general European policy, or even his policy on EEC issues. The other side of Moravcsik's own coin is that after January 1962 de Gaulle was less constrained by purely commercial considerations and could thus give freer rein to his basic political philosophy. In other words, the tougher version of the Fouchet Plan was a purer reflection of de Gaulle's political vision and deserves to be taken seriously. Thus the hardening of French policy on this issue does not prove that geopolitical considerations played a minimal role in shaping de Gaulle's European policy either before or after January 1962.

Turning now to Moravcsik's section on the "empty chair" crisis, his discussion here is something of a mixed bag. He says that "commercial concerns explain much about the origins of the crisis and nearly everything about its outcome" (Part 2, p. 37). But I cannot see how commercial concerns explain much about the origins of this affair. Moravcsik himself says that the withdrawal of the French representatives was not designed to secure agreement on the CAP, a goal that had already "been achieved" before the boycott began, and that de Gaulle "deliberately provoked" the crisis as a bid for "fundamental reform of the EEC" along the lines of the philosophy reflected in the Fouchet Plan (Part 2, pp. 38–39). But Moravcsik does show that agricul-

tural considerations—and the major domestic political forces connected with them—played a fundamental role in constraining French policy and compelling de Gaulle to accept a compromise that gave him only half a loaf. Taken as a whole, this again shows that agricultural interests were important, but it does not show that de Gaulle's geopolitical vision was a “largely insignificant” factor in shaping French policy on these issues.

Finally, we come now to what is by far the most important and most interesting of Moravcsik's four cases: de Gaulle's opposition to British membership in the Common Market. It is in this section that Moravcsik poses his most fundamental challenge to the conventional wisdom. The near-universal view is that this aspect of de Gaulle's policy is to be interpreted in political rather than economic terms; indeed, the General's veto of Britain's admission into the Common Market in January 1963 is the first thing most scholars would point to if asked to prove that de Gaulle's policy was rooted essentially in a political vision. But Moravcsik attacks this view head on; he states very directly that “a geopolitical interpretation makes little sense of French hostility toward British membership” in the EEC (Part 2, p. 34).

Moravcsik supports his general claim with a number of more specific arguments. He stresses the “substantial *convergence* of British and French geopolitical and ideological interests,” especially the fact that both states were opposed to supranational institutions and tended instead to think of a Europe based on nation-states (Part 2, p. 18, emphasis his). He makes an argument about timing: He claims that de Gaulle's victory in the parliamentary elections in November 1962 shows that “commercial and domestic electoral concerns” explain why he vetoed British admission just a couple of months later (Part 2, p. 30). Moravcsik says, moreover, that there is very little direct evidence of a “link between geopolitical ideas and the British veto,” and that interpretations making such a link are speculations grounded in “de Gaulle's general writings and utterances” (Part 2, p. 8). The “preponderance of evidence,” he argues, supports his own interpretation, and indeed he claims that “not a single passage, quoted in context, clearly supports the view that de Gaulle's concerns about British membership were primarily geopolitical” (Part 2, pp. 8, 26). What is to be made of these claims?

First, consider the argument about a convergence of geopolitical views. My sense here is that Moravcsik's field of vision is too limited. What he has in mind, above all, is that both France and Britain were thinking in terms of a Europe of nation-states, which was certainly the case. But this was by no means all there was to the “geopolitical” question for de Gaulle. What he wanted was a Europe independent of the United States; the main problem with Britain, as he saw it, was that it was an American satellite. If allowed into the European Community, Britain would sabotage his policy of trying to

build a “European Europe.” In this fundamental area there was no “convergence” at all. The two countries were very much at odds on the issue of relations with the United States.

What about the argument concerning timing? If the veto had come *before* the elections, and if it had been presented to the electorate as a defense of French agricultural interests, there would have been something to this argument. But *after* the elections, de Gaulle was freer to pursue whatever policy he wanted, including a policy based on his fundamental political philosophy. The fact that de Gaulle triumphed in the November 1962 elections may help explain the timing of the veto, but it does not throw any light on the question of motivation.

Next, let us consider the question of evidence. The analysis here will have four parts. I want to deal first with Moravcsik’s argument in this section about de Gaulle’s memoirs, then with his discussion of the June 1962 Champs conference, then with his analysis of de Gaulle’s press conference on 14 January 1963, and finally with his use of the German record of de Gaulle’s meetings with Adenauer about a week later.

First, Moravcsik says that concrete discussion of the British veto in de Gaulle’s memoirs focuses narrowly on “French commercial objectives,” especially those relating to agriculture. At one point, he admits, de Gaulle reflects on “the problems of divergent national characters. De Gaulle mentions in passing the threat of an ‘Atlantic system.’ Yet none of this is linked to the EEC” (Part 2, pp. 25–26). The passage cited by Moravcsik (from p. 182 of de Gaulle’s memoirs) is the one referred to above in which de Gaulle outlines his general policy of building a “concert of European states” and points out that this led him to “put the European Economic Community into effect.” De Gaulle then adds that part of this policy was “to prevent certain others, in particular Great Britain, from dragging the West into an Atlantic system that would be totally incompatible with a European Europe.” What one has here, it seems to me, is a much more explicit link between the EEC and geopolitical issues than Moravcsik indicated.

Moravcsik then goes on to say, still referring to the memoirs, that de Gaulle’s “direct, detailed discussion of French opposition to British EEC membership immediately follows his analysis of French attitudes toward the CAP and focuses exclusively and quite unambiguously on commercial interest”; as proof, Moravcsik (Part 2, pp. 25–26) cites a passage beginning on p. 198 of the memoirs. This passage is from the part of the book dealing with nuts-and-bolts issues deriving from divergent national interests within the EEC.⁷ But

7. *Ibid.* The transitional paragraph comes on p. 192.

even here the passage is not how Moravcsik presents it. The focus here was not “exclusively” on commercial questions, and begins in fact with de Gaulle’s claim that the British were making trouble for the EEC, and his observation

It was not surprising that Great Britain should be radically opposed to the whole venture, since by virtue of her geography and therefore her policy, she has never been willing to see the continent united, or to merge herself with it.⁸

“Her geography and therefore her policy”—this strikes me as very clearly a political, not an economic, point. It was not that de Gaulle ignored economic matters; it was simply that political considerations were not “largely insignificant” in shaping his policy on these issues. The impression you get from de Gaulle’s memoirs, in fact, is that economic and political arguments were tightly linked and indeed pointed in the same direction.

But de Gaulle’s memoirs are not the only source cited here, and Moravcsik, to his great credit, has gone into the archives and used other long-unavailable historical materials. What does this relatively new evidence show? Let me begin here with his discussion of the Anglo-French meeting at Champs in June 1962.

Moravcsik portrays de Gaulle as beginning the meeting by stressing France’s need to export agricultural products and “insistently raising the issue of Commonwealth commodity imports, which he termed ‘the most fundamental’ issue.” Moravcsik has British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan trying to steer the talks away from economic and toward political and defense issues, “only to have the General shift [the topic] back.” When, however, geopolitical issues are discussed, Moravcsik has de Gaulle and Macmillan on more or less the same wavelength (Part 2, pp. 18–19).

Both the British and the French records of the Champs meeting are now readily available in the United States, and it is relatively easy to check these claims against the evidence.⁹ On Moravcsik’s first point, it is Macmillan who begins the meeting with a long discussion that emphasizes economic issues; de Gaulle, in a relatively brief interjection, agrees that agriculture is important to France. He does not raise the Commonwealth issue, let alone “insistently”; it is Macmillan, not de Gaulle, who refers to it as the “most

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 198–199.

9. The French record appeared in the *DDF*, 1962, Vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998), Doc. 172, pp. 554–571. The British record from PREM 11/3775 at the Public Record Office (“Visit of the Prime Minister to the Chateau de Champs, June 2–3, 1962”) is available in the very valuable CD-ROM publication, “Macmillan Cabinet Papers, 1957–1963,” published by Adam Matthew Publications in Great Britain in 1999 and available in certain American university libraries (hereinafter referred to as “the British record”).

fundamental” problem.¹⁰ De Gaulle, moreover, does not shy away in these talks from geopolitical issues. He talks repeatedly and at length about the importance of building a Europe that had a political personality of its own, and says in fact (unambiguously in the French record) that the EEC was a means to this end.¹¹ Here is how he puts the issue to Macmillan at one point:

Let me explain the basis of my thinking to you. I'm an old Frenchman. The Common Market, the common policy with Germany and Italy—that's already a major effort. I'm trying to pursue that policy. Because of the Soviet threat, obviously, but also in order to create something that is not dependent on the Americans. The two factors that are driving us forward are, first, the threat [from the East], and second, the will to become independent once again.

And he then asks the British prime minister point blank whether he agrees.¹²

This, to my mind, is the heart of the discussion at Champs. The United Kingdom, de Gaulle noted, “said she wished to enter the [European] Community,” but he wondered about Britain’s ties outside Europe and wondered whether, “politically speaking,” Britain really preferred “Europe to the United States.”¹³ Macmillan disliked having the issue posed so sharply, but in these talks he did try to convince de Gaulle that Britain was willing to opt for Europe: There was no great love for the American alliance in England, Macmillan said; “We do not wish to be American satellites.”¹⁴ But de Gaulle was simply not convinced. Britain, he told Macmillan over and over, had made progress and was indeed becoming more “European,” but it was still too tied to the overseas world, particularly to America; Britain was not yet ready to take the plunge and choose between Europe and the United States.¹⁵ Under those circumstances, British entry into the Common Market would change everything; the clear implication was that it might well destroy all hope of building a truly independent Europe.

Agriculture was not the crucial factor. Macmillan at Champs was ready to make sweeping concessions to the French in this area. De Gaulle had earlier wondered whether Britain was willing to accept the economic system established by the six continental countries, and it was clear now, he said,

10. See pp. 7–8 in the British record, and *DDF*, 1962, Vol. 1, pp. 555–556 for the French record.

11. See especially *DDF*, 1962, Vol. 1, pp. 558, 561, 566; and pp. 9, 11, 14 in the British record.

12. *DDF*, 1962, Vol. 1, pp. 559.

13. In the British record, p. 13.

14. *DDF*, 1962, Vol. 1, pp. 559, 565; and in the British record, p. 13.

15. *DDF*, 1962, Vol. 1, pp. 558, 565, 566–567; British record, pp. 9, 13, 14.

that the answer to this question was yes. De Gaulle had earlier used various economic arguments—especially about Britain’s supposed unwillingness to accept the system established by the Treaty of Rome—as an excuse for keeping the British out. But now Macmillan’s concessions had in effect stripped away that mask and forced de Gaulle to lay out his real thinking. Even if Britain “accepted the Treaty of Rome in full,” de Gaulle noted, he was still reluctant to let the British in: British entry into the Common Market would create an entirely new situation, in both a political and an economic sense.¹⁶ So the records of the Champs meeting really do not support Moravcsik’s thesis.

What about Moravcsik’s argument concerning de Gaulle’s famous press conference of 14 January 1963? Snippets from de Gaulle’s statement here, Moravcsik says, are “almost invariably cited out of context” by writers seeking to show that the French veto of British admission into the Common Market had a geopolitical taproot. In reality, according to Moravcsik, de Gaulle’s comments here “were entirely and unambiguously dedicated to a discussion of the political economy of Britain and the United States” (Part 2, pp. 10, 66). Moravcsik says that when de Gaulle warned that British entry into the Common Market would lead to a “gigantic Atlantic Community dependent upon, and under the control of, the United States,” he was referring “exclusively” and “unambiguously” to “overwhelming U.S. economic influence” (Part 1, p. 12, fn. 29, and Part 2, p. 11).

Well, how does Moravcsik know? After all, de Gaulle does not refer here to a “gigantic Atlantic *economic* Community,” or a Community that was *economically* dependent on the United States, or one that American producers would dominate *economically*. How, indeed, can anyone tell what de Gaulle had in mind? The answer is by looking carefully at both text and context. When studying context, it is important to look both at the rest of de Gaulle’s press conference statement and at other comments he made around this time bearing on the same question, above all those made at private meetings.

Let us first take a look at the phrase itself, “une Communauté atlantique colossale sous dépendance et direction américaines.”¹⁷ Moravcsik translates this as “the colossal Atlantic area under American dominance” (Part 2, p. 11), but this translation is misleading in a number of ways. The use of the definite article gives the impression that de Gaulle is referring to something that already existed; the word “area” carries much less political weight than the term

16. *DDF*, 1962, Vol. 1, pp. 555, 567; in the British record, pp. 7, 13–15. See also the discussion in Vaisse, *La grandeur*, pp. 200–201. Note finally in this context Raymond Poidevin’s similar interpretation of de Gaulle’s defense of the EEC in 1958: “Pour contrer les Anglais, il a joué la carte du respect de la lettre et de l’esprit du traité de Rome.” Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 194.

17. The official transcript appears in Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, Vol. 4 (Paris: Plon, 1970), pp. 66–71.

“Community,” which had acquired a distinct connotation because of common references in political discourse to the “European Communities”; and the deletion of any equivalent for the French word *“direction,”* which means something like “control,” also serves to play down the political content of this passage. It is thus perfectly plausible to interpret the phrase in political terms.

What about the rest of the statement? De Gaulle does talk a lot about economic issues. But his discussion here does not dwell “exclusively” on French commercial interests. At one point, in fact, he says that the six continental countries formed a kind of strategic unit because in security terms they all had to deal with a common threat from the East. There is no denying the fact, however, that de Gaulle emphasizes economic issues in his press conference statement.

But how is this emphasis to be interpreted? De Gaulle did not have to give too sharp a political point to what he was saying; he could afford to be less explicit in public, since he could take it for granted that no one would have any trouble reading between the lines, and he could deliberately dwell on the economic side of the problem. As Moravcsik himself points out, de Gaulle ignored geopolitical issues deliberately because, as he noted to close associates, “the question of Britain in the Common Market sufficed” (Part 2, p. 11). De Gaulle, in that same passage, went on to note that the link with the Nassau agreement (and, by implication, with geopolitical issues in general) was “implicit.” France was rejecting the American system; Britain was not. Britain was becoming an American satellite, and France, he said, would not play that role.¹⁸ But the political rationale for excluding Britain did not have to be spelled out too sharply.

During another meeting at the beginning of 1963, the same general point emerged. If Britain came into the Common Market, de Gaulle said, it would be a “Trojan horse for the Americans,” which would mean the end of any hope for European independence. De Gaulle was then asked whether he was going to say that at his press conference, scheduled to take place a few days later. “Not like that!” he replied.¹⁹ It follows that he had decided to play down the political rationale for his veto. One should therefore not read too much into the fact that he spoke at length about economic problems at the press conference.

The West German sources also throw a good deal of light on the question of what de Gaulle was thinking at this time. De Gaulle met Adenauer just seven days after the 14 January press conference—this was the meeting that led to the famous Elysée Treaty—and the issue of the veto was obviously on both men’s minds. The German records of these conversations were pub-

18. Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, Vol. 1, p. 336.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 348; see also p. 282. Moravcsik discusses this passage in Part 2, p. 28, fn. 81.

lished in 1994, and Moravcsik cites them in support of his argument. “In his first face-to-face discussion with Adenauer following the veto,” Moravcsik writes, “de Gaulle stressed that the ‘critical point’ was the lack of British commitment to a ‘real Common Market,’ meaning one with a ‘common external tariff’ and ‘common rules . . . particularly in agriculture’” (Part 2, p. 16).

Is it true that de Gaulle emphasized economic considerations when discussing the British question with Adenauer? When the subject came up at their first meeting on 21 January, de Gaulle focused on political and strategic questions. Britain, he said, was not as sensitive to the Soviet threat as the Europeans were; the British did not think and act the same way that the Europeans did. The British would go along with American policy even when they did not like it. Macmillan had said that he wanted Britain to be part of Europe—economically, politically, and militarily as well. But in practical terms, de Gaulle said, Macmillan was just not willing to take the plunge. De Gaulle did not go on to say explicitly “and that’s why I decided to veto British admission into the Common Market.” But with the press conference still very fresh in everyone’s mind, how could anyone (as de Gaulle well knew) *not* make the connection between this set of arguments and the position he had taken on 14 January?²⁰

The passage Moravcsik cites in his article is from the record of the second de Gaulle-Adenauer meeting on 22 January. Again, my reading of the passage is a little different from his. De Gaulle was emphasizing political considerations here; if the British came in, he was afraid the European Community would not be “European” enough; the EEC would no longer have much meaning in political terms. From a purely economic point of view, de Gaulle seems to be saying, British entry might not be so bad. Indeed, for countries like West Germany, and now France, he maintained, “it was entirely conceivable to have no external tariff at all; free trade with the whole world was a real possibility.” But if they went that route, it would no longer make sense to talk about building Europe, “especially not a Europe based on shared economic interests. If you want a real Europe, you need to have a common tariff and common rules to which everyone is subject.” Should we give it all up now, he asked (presumably by allowing Britain to come in)? That, he said, was the question.²¹

The main point here is that de Gaulle valued the economic structure for political reasons: Europe, as a distinct political entity, was to be built on an economic base; if you destroyed that base by destroying the strong economic structures, you could just forget about ever building a politically independent

20. De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting, 21 January 1963, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 1963, Vol. 1 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1994), pp. 115–116.

21. De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting, 22 January 1963, *ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

Europe. Bringing in Britain and its entourage would, in de Gaulle's view, create an entirely new situation: it would effectively do away with what had already been accomplished.

To be sure, de Gaulle had said that the key point was Britain's unwillingness to accept the Treaty of Rome and come into the Common Market under the same conditions that applied to everyone else. But this was simply a convenient pretext. Moravcsik himself characterized it at an earlier point in his article as "disingenuous" (Part 2, p. 4). Indeed, Moravcsik's whole discussion at the beginning of his section on British membership in the EEC suggests that economic issues were *not* fundamental here: What he implies in that passage (correctly, I think) is that no matter how far Britain was willing to go in making concessions, there was no way de Gaulle could have been won over (Part 2, p. 5). And in fact this is the impression one gets from other sources as well.²² So if economic differences were not the fundamental factor here, the real problem must have been political. The mainstream interpretation thus holds up rather well in this key area.

So, what does this all boil down to? The basic conclusion is that Moravcsik goes much too far in claiming that de Gaulle's geopolitical vision played a "largely insignificant" role in shaping his policy on the EEC. But this does not mean that Moravcsik's whole argument is to be dismissed out of hand. Indeed, the analysis he develops here is valuable for two distinct reasons. First, he does demonstrate the great importance that de Gaulle attached to economic issues and the fundamental role that agricultural factors played in French policy in this area. This is an important point, and for me at least it was a surprising one—although I should add that I am not really a specialist in this area.

The second reason is that grappling with Moravcsik's argument, even if in the final analysis you end up disagreeing with some of his central claims, forces you to think about certain issues of method—about the basis of our understanding of the past and indeed of international politics in general. How do we know what we think we know? How sure can we be that our beliefs are correct? What degree of confidence can we place in our own judgments? By what method can we put our understanding of the past on a firmer basis?

What I came away with is this: Our understanding, most of the time, is not derived from close study of the empirical evidence; it is instead the product essentially of a thought process in which inferences are drawn according

22. See, for example, Vaisse, *La grandeur*, p. 194. Note also, for example, the British diplomat Eric Roll's report of a conversation that took place shortly before the Champs meeting with the French negotiator Clappier. When Roll suggested to the Anglophile Clappier that he assumed the latter's "instructions at the moment are to slow everything down," the Frenchman "replied that unfortunately they were worse than that." Eric Roll to Sir Frank Lee, 18 May 1962, in the Public Record Office, Prem 11/3775, and available in the CD-ROM cited in fn. 9 above, image 153 in that file.

to a very general sense of how things work. In forming one's own beliefs, the key test has to do much more with plausibility than with evidence. In this case, de Gaulle (as Moravcsik recognizes) really believed in the importance of "building Europe"—a "European Europe" able to chart its own course in international affairs. Moravcsik would have us believe that de Gaulle took this goal seriously, but that it had essentially no impact on his policy toward the EEC. My own assumption, without looking at a single document, was that this could not possibly be correct. The EEC could not have been devoid of political meaning, either in de Gaulle's mind or in anyone else's.

The general assumption here is that economic constructs of this sort almost inevitably have a political dimension. The decision in the early days of the American republic to put the regulation of interstate commerce under the jurisdiction of the federal government had enormous political significance, and one can take it for granted that people were aware of that at the time. The exclusion of Austria from the Prussian-dominated Zollverein in mid-nineteenth century Germany also had an obvious political dimension; one simply takes it for granted that people at the time understood why these matters were so important in political terms. These assumptions are based to a certain degree on an understanding of the logic of the relationship between economics and politics. They are based to a certain extent also on a degree of familiarity with the political culture involved. In the case of Europe in the 1950s, people would have assumed that a link of this sort existed, in part because of their historical experience with such institutions as the German Zollverein. You rely, in other words, on a certain general sense of how things work. This sense, and not close study of the relevant body of empirical evidence, is what shapes our understanding of most historical episodes—that is, all but the very few episodes we are able to study in some depth. That sense may be confirmed or shaken by a study of how other scholars, especially talented and intelligent scholars, deal with the issue.

But you cannot always just leave it at that. Sometimes even very commonly held assumptions turn out to be wrong. Sometimes a grandiose political vision has little to do with actual policy as it is hammered out at the operational level. When assumptions are questioned, the challenge—especially when it is mounted by an obviously intelligent scholar—should not be dismissed out of hand. At this point, to get to the bottom of the issue, you have to go through the empirical evidence with some care. You have to try to "translate" different interpretations into stories about the past, stories that can be tested against the empirical evidence.

Take the case, for example, of French opposition to British entry into the Common Market. If the documents showed that the French would have liked to see Britain come into Europe for political reasons, that they favored Brit-

ish entry (assuming acceptable economic terms could be worked out), and that the negotiations foundered because the British refused to accept the economic conditions on which France insisted, then this would suggest that an economic interpretation of French policy would be correct. But if it became clear through a close study of the negotiations at Brussels that the economic issues were being resolved, and if the French documents showed that de Gaulle wanted to keep the British out no matter what they agreed to in the economic area, then one would have to lean in the other direction.

In sorting out these issues—in deciding between conflicting interpretations—it is important to deal with the challenge on its own terms: by examining arguments and not just by presenting counterarguments, and by examining the evidence the author presents and not just by citing counterevidence. It is only in this way that scholarly debate can be truly productive. Scholars often simply talk past each other. Nothing definite, nothing conclusive, ever seems to emerge from discussions of that sort. It is different when arguments are engaged on their own terms; you can, in such cases, actually hope to reach certain firm conclusions. Part of the reason is that such an approach allows you to draw certain strong inferences from an analysis of the evidence cited. The author has an interest in making as cogent a case as possible; if even the evidence that the author himself cites fails to prove the basic point, maybe that point does not really rest on a firm evidentiary base at all.

What we are doing here is in a sense looking for shortcuts. No one has the time to go to all the archives, read all the secondary literature, and study every important issue very closely. We therefore need an efficient method of forming an opinion about the degree of confidence to be assigned to most of our important beliefs about the past. The close analysis of other people's arguments is an important means to this end. By doing exercises of this sort, we can really hope to resolve these problems of interpretation—to our own, if not to everyone's, satisfaction.