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Carolina Armenteros and Richard A. Lebrun, eds., *Joseph de Maistre and His European Readers: From Friedrich von Gentz to Isaiah Berlin*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011. vii + 303 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$141.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-90-04-19394-9.

Reviewed by Steven Kale, Washington State University.

Richard Lebrun was one of the figures behind the rebirth of Maistre studies in the 1970s, when the Société des amis de Joseph et Xavier de Maistre and its associated journal, the *Revue des études maistriennes*, were founded. He has devoted his entire professional career to studying Maistre and to making Maistre's work known in the English-speaking world in translation.[1] He also mentored a younger generation of Maistre scholars, including his co-editor, Carolina Armenteros, with whom he co-edited two volumes, in addition to the one under review, which brought together papers first presented at the Fifth International Colloquium on Joseph de Maistre held at Jesus College, Cambridge in 2008. Armenteros recently published a major study of Maistre's historical thought which challenges a number of conventional ideas about his politics and legacy.[2] Many of the contributors to the present volume have been associated with the *Revue des études maistriennes*, including Lebrun, Jean-Louis Darcel, the journal's co-founder, and Michael Kohlhauer, its current editor. Together with the younger historians, philosophers, and literary scholars whose works appear in this collection, the authors constitute an interdisciplinary group uniquely situated to offer a solid introduction to the nature and scope of recent Maistrian scholarship.

According to Armenteros and Lebrun, Maistre continues to be too narrowly read at a time when global developments have given his work wider relevance. Having been pigeon-holed as a reactionary thinker, scholars have misunderstood the nature, significance and influence of his thought during a period when religion had gained a growing importance in contemporary life and Maistrian studies struck out in new directions. Collectively, the authors set out to assess Maistre's influence in order "to exemplify the wide diversity of uses, philosophical and political, that have been made of Maistre's work, and to suggest why it has been read continuously across the centuries" (p. 4), although they chose to limit the scope of their project by setting aside certain European regions and by ignoring Maistre's reception among traditionalists, arguably his most persistent readers. The authors seek to reorient the scholarship on Maistre's reception away from the history of Catholic conservatism and authoritarian ideologies toward a broader view of his posterity. They also wish to challenge Robert Triomphe's biography, which they see as "marred by systematic hostility to his subject and lack of access to Maistre's manuscripts and papers" (p. 10). This is the subject of Darcel's personal recollection of the beginning of modern Maistre studies, in which he played a key role by negotiating access to the Maistre family archives. Darcel is especially keen to show that Triomphe was wrong to present Maistre as an embittered opportunist and an intolerant fanatic.[3] Another more explicit goal of the collection is to argue against Isaiah Berlin's thesis that Maistre was a fascist precursor by showing, among other things, that the Savoyard was "a cosmopolitan thinker whose thought transcended time and place" (p. 14). In opposition to Berlin, the authors insist that Maistre's heritage was abundantly utilized by left-wing and anti-Christian thinkers, and that he was read with interest and theoretical profit by his enemies.[4]

The collection is divided into five parts corresponding to the major European states. In part one, Cyprian Blamires, once a graduate student of Berlin's at Oxford, chides Berlin for misreading Maistre's thought and explains why Berlin's attempt to identify Maistre with fascism fails in light of "what fascism actually was" (p. 30). Blamires' critique is the emotional heart of a collection dedicated in part to the rectification of Maistre's historical reputation and the essay likely to attract the most interest. It subjects each element of Berlin's case to a convincing refutation that reads very much like a legal brief. He argues first of all that Berlin's thesis is not supported by an accurate description of fascism and that no variant of fascism bears much resemblance to Maistre's ideas, which were papalist and universalist. Blamires points out that Maistre was neither a racialist nor a revolutionary, and he justifies Maistre's alleged preoccupation with blood, death, and war in *Les soirées de Saint Petersburg* in terms of Maistre's theodicy and in the context of the carnage of the Napoleonic Wars, where Maistre appears as a realist and a powerful guide to the reality of evil in the world and the presence of God in history.

Berlin's case rests in large part on a number of tenuous similarities between Maistre's thought and fascist attitudes with which Blamires rightly takes issue: that Maistre and the fascists had the same list of enemies; that both were preoccupied with the threat of dark forces; Maistre's preference for pre-modern forms of punishment; Maistre's opposition to the French Revolution; his appeal to blind faith; his hatred for liberalism; his contempt for the subversive role of intellectuals; his advocacy in favor of infallible authority; and his rejection of the free traffic in ideas. In each instance, Blamires tries to demonstrate the dubious nature of Berlin's argument, although in some respects his refutation is equally debatable, as when he sees Maistre as prescient for pointing to the role of Jansenists and Protestants in launching the French Revolution. Blamires seems to view Berlin's essay as part of a lifelong project to justify the liberalism of John Stuart Mill and suggests that, in this regard, Berlin might have taken better account of the work of J. L. Talmon, with whom Berlin shared common concerns and who did not see Maistre as a forerunner of totalitarianism.[5] "In truth," Blamires concludes, "for anyone who is to any degree acquainted with the literature of fascism, Berlin's attempt to connect Maistre to it can only be regarded as absurd" (pp. 54-55).

Part two focuses on nineteenth-century France and begins with Kevin Erwin's study of how Barbey d'Aurevilly modeled himself on Maistre as a polemicist and literary critic who championed an anti-progressive form of historiography. Inspired by Maistre, Barbey took up the mantle of the Grand Interpreter and Critic, passing judgment on the past—and particularly the French Revolution. According to Erwin, Barbey refashioned Maistre's hermeneutics into a functional tool of historical criticism in the service of an iconoclastic sensibility that moved against the grain and in opposition to his contemporaries. For Barbey, Maistre's understanding of history served as a formidable counterpoint to the dominant narrative of nineteenth-century free-thinkers and the "philosophers of systems." Barbey used Maistre to offer a critique of "the lack of a theological perspective in the modern era" and joined Maistre in seeing evil as "the real mainspring of the political world" (pp. 67-68). The two shared a vision of the workings of Providence and man's instrumentalization throughout the course of history, but Erwin contends that Barbey went further than Maistre by making a case for the primacy of tradition—embodied by the Catholic Church—in all matters. Tonatiuh Sandoval's more focused essay examines how Auguste Comte's reading of *Du pape* helped him to develop a theory of spiritual authority intended to bind Europe together by influencing its overall moral and intellectual development. Comte discovered Maistre through Saint-Simon and saw in his works "the most methodical display of the old spiritual organization" (p. 75). Although he considered Maistre the leader of the "retrograde school" and rejected his counter-revolutionary doctrine, he was fascinated by Maistre's approach to the history of the papacy and used it to theorize European unity. The convergence between Maistre and Comte came by way of Félicité de Lamennais and a shared critique of the Holy Alliance, which convinced Comte that Europe needed a principle of unity analogous to the effective role of the medieval papacy, which he found in *Du pape*. There, Maistre's case for infallibility modeled the idea of a fixed authority and a "fixing belief," placed beyond doubt, to counter the rebelliousness of European mores (p. 82). Although

Comte viewed Catholic dogma as divisive because it excluded people of other faiths, he located the church's catholicity in its organization. Consequently, he proposed a de-Christianized version of Maistre's spiritual authority based on a universally accepted positive science authorized and inculcated by a new pan-European priesthood of learned scholars.

Raphaël Cahen's examination of the correspondence of Friedrich von Gentz is the first of four essays on Maistre's German readers. Cahen wants to know how *Du pape* influenced the development of Gentz's counter-revolutionary thought, but she has a number of larger objectives: to illuminate the scope of Europe's counter-revolutionary networks; gauge the reception of Maistre in the German-speaking world; and reopen the debate on Gentz's relationship with Francophone traditionalists. Gentz never converted to Catholicism and never assigned religion a practical role in politics. Nevertheless, according to Cahen, he grew more conservative and more open to religious issues through his encounter with the works of Louis de Bonald and Lamennais and as a result of his relations with French Ultras with whom he shared a common view of Metternich's foreign policy. Cahen speculates that Gentz heard about *Du pape* through his alliance with French monarchists and as a participant in a trans-national network of conservative publicists. Although he shared many of Maistre's ideas on international affairs during the Napoleonic period, he did not mention Maistre's work in his correspondence until 1820, when he and Adam Müller began to discuss the notion of a European federative constitution. Gentz opposed Müller's "theological-mystical" tendencies as politically irrelevant but set about enthusiastically reading *Du pape*, which led him to Maistre's other works.

Cahen wonders whether his infatuation with Maistre was fleeting or whether it marked a great opening for Gentz to embrace theological questions and move closer to Maistre's ideas. In answering this question, Gentz's annotations are not very helpful. Cahen is left to speculate that several elements concerning his reading of *Du pape* indicate more than a simple platonic feeling towards Maistre's work, but she can only argue in terms of similarities and analogies and conclude that "his cheerful reading of *Du pape*" raised questions in his mind about spirituality and his relationship to the Catholic Church (pp. 115-116). Cahen, however, is not able to show that Gentz used Maistre to think through issues that were particularly important to him. Nevertheless, Gentz became an advocate and defender of the ideas of Maistre and Bonald in the German-speaking world, which ironically saw limited circulation due to the provisions of the Carlsbad Decrees that Gentz helped to promote.[6]

The next two essays, by a German Studies professor and a doctoral candidate in philosophy respectively, may be of less interest to historians. Adrian Daub follows a labored path in examining how the French counter-revolutionary model of the family influenced the history of German Romanticism, contending that the German reaction to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution was powerfully structured by familial metaphors, which in turn drew German writers toward the works of Maistre and Bonald. Daub wants to show how the engagement with Maistre and Bonald made German Romantics more conservative by turning their attitude toward monarchy, religion, and the Revolution and away from a Kantian anti-Rousseauism, although he does not discuss other factors that may have accounted for this shift. More specifically, Daub charts this evolution in German Romanticism by "constructing a relationship" between Maistre's ideas on the family and those of Novalis, Friedrich Schegel, and Franz von Baader, even though Maistre had relatively little to say about the family and no evidence exists to show that Novalis was aware of Maistre's work (p. 124).

Thus begins a circuitous linkage between Maistre and German Romanticism grounded in what Daub sees as a much broader and more general discourse that perceived analogies between the family and the state, best exemplified not by Maistre but by Bonald's *Du divorce*, which the Romantics would only encounter in the late stages of their movement. The point of contact between Novalis, Bonald, and Maistre is a mutual "analogizing cognition" related to a shared preference for the organic constitution of state and society, which Daub finds in Novalis' reflections on loving royal couples and their kingdoms in

fairy tales (p. 133-136), even though Novalis envisioned a society that is “unified and harmonious but not necessarily hierarchical and paternalistic” (p. 139). Schegel, whose early views were “quite far away” from those of the French counter-revolutionaries, eventually came to appreciate Maistre as a philosopher of religion and a proponent of the unification of faith and reason, torn apart by the Enlightenment (p. 143-144).

Baader, a Catholic opponent of German idealism who alone among the three maintained a sustained engagement with Maistre’s thought, viewed Maistre as a philosopher of nature, trying to reconcile divine providence and natural history. He brought Maistre’s ideas to bear on a wide variety of topics, including erotic philosophy, family cohesion, and the state, but the marginal notes he made in Maistre’s works reveal an oblique reader who twisted Maistre’s arguments in directions that Daub himself thinks Maistre would have found strange. Daub insists that Maistre caused the Romantics to rethink their earlier positions in a more conservative direction, but he fails to give decisive proof of the centrality of Maistre’s works in their gradual rightward inflection. The German reading of Maistre appears spotty and esoteric, points of contact often seem coincidental, and the theme of the family becomes more and more diffuse. The shift in the tone in German Romanticism could just have easily resulted from the broader themes that flowed from the general reaction to the French Revolution and Napoleon.

Ryohei Kageura’s essay on the indirect influence that Maistre may have exerted on Walter Benjamin is even more convoluted. Kageura seeks to clarify the relationship between Benjamin’s and Maistre’s theological interpretation of modernity, which, he admits, is “not an easy task,” since Benjamin hardly mentions Maistre and may only have read *L’examen de la philosophie de Bacon*. Kageura constructs an indirect route between the two thinkers through Charles Baudelaire, whose work echoes Maistrian themes that Kageura finds in Benjamin’s ideas on the detective novel. Armenteros and Lebrun summarize Kageura’s thesis as follows: “Maistre’s critique of Bacon’s linguistics and Benjamin’s analysis of detective deciphering are genealogically related, while Benjamin’s interpretation of Revolution is derived from Baudelaire, and thereby ultimately from Maistre” (p. 13). Such interpretive alchemy allows Benjamin to think of Maistre as sharing his central interest in the relationship between modernity and theology insofar as both assert that a relativistic vision of the world impoverishes human experience. Since both sought a form of redemption from modernity conceivable within a religious schema, Maistre “would inevitably be a point of reference to Benjamin, because Benjamin tried to interpret modernity in a theological manner” (p. 154). Kageura locates Benjamin’s sense of modernity in his reflections on the detective novel, where Maistre’s anti-Baconian idea exists surreptitiously as a reaction to the anonymity and atomism of mass urban society. The purpose of this analysis is to show that Benjamin understood modernity as embodying social mistrust and the practices that mitigate it in order to assert that Maistre’s criticism of Bacon allowed Benjamin to consider “that the Maistrian idea is likely to criticize modernity” (p. 157).

From there, Kageura meanders through an explanation of Maistre’s critique of Bacon’s philosophy and epistemology in order to claim that “the problem Maistre proposes is very close to the problem of modernity that Benjamin proposes,” which involves modernity’s promotion of the profusion of isolated ideas through the destruction of experience as the inter-subjective sphere linking ideas together. This analogous preoccupation forms a bridge between modernity and Maistre’s idea of original sin, the upshot of which is to show that Benjamin rejects Maistre’s pessimism (as if the two were in dialogue) by asserting that modernity preserves the desire to reestablish mutual human trust. At this point, the detective novel brings us back to Baudelaire, who translated a number of works by Edgar Allan Poe, even though he never wrote a detective novel himself. All the elements of the detective novel as described by Benjamin can be found in the works of Baudelaire except the detective himself, whose representational function (the use of reason to identify guilt) was opposed to Baudelaire’s conviction that everyone was guilty because of original sin. The absence of the detective in Baudelaire is negative proof that the reactionary desire for social wholeness (represented by Maistre) exists alongside isolation and

mistrust in Benjamin's view of modernity. Kageura's final task is to link Benjamin's notion of redemption to Maistre's theory of the reversibility of merits (in which God punishes the innocent to save the guilty) by showing how Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire's view of revolution recapitulates the dialectic of order and destruction mirrored in the detective novel and present in modernity in general.

Like Benjamin, the subject of Michael Kohlhauser's paper is interested in Maistre because both conceived of modernity as containing anti-modernity. Kohlhauser claims to uncover the dialectical reading of Maistre in Herbert Marcuse's essay on the Counter-Revolution, written in 1936 and republished in 1969. Marcuse did not mention Maistre in the original version but unexpectedly quoted him without comment in the 1969 republication. Kohlhauser explains this change by insisting that Marcuse meant the two versions of the same essay to serve two distinct critical purposes, so that the 1969 version was able to "say something else" (p. 178). In 1936, Marcuse wanted to criticize fascism in terms of its various manifestations but, in 1969, he hoped to offer a critical alternative to triumphant capitalism, setting aside an exploration of the social psychology of authoritarianism for a radical critique of the consumer society. The realities of advanced Western societies in the 1960s were far removed from the libertarian utopia theorized by Marcuse, underscoring the failures of the Enlightenment and thwarting the expectations of the bourgeoisie. "In short, everything takes place as Maistre has foreseen, if not predicted" (p. 181). The eighteenth-century promise of emancipation had given rise to a new, hidden form of servitude.

In his essay, Marcuse explained that the bourgeoisie became counter-revolutionary and abandoned the liberal values proclaimed during its ascendancy once it was confronted by new revolutionary forces. This is a classic Marxist view of fascism, quite common in the 1930s, but in 1969, with the addition of quotations from Maistre, it was cast in terms of an historical ruse, as history operating through reversals and inversions to produce unintended outcomes. The Maistrian *topos* serves to highlight the failure of the Enlightenment and the folly of hoping for a better world. Maistre's presence in the latter version of the essay allowed Marcuse to express simultaneously Maistre's pessimism about post-revolutionary society and implicitly posit its opposite, the possibility of utopia. Kohlhauser notes the "family relationship" between Marcuse's apparent dialogue with Maistre and the goals of the Frankfurt School, whose principal representatives raised similar questions about bourgeois self-betrayal and the use of modern rationalism as an instrument of social domination in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, which Kohlhauser regards as "no less Maistrian" than Marcuse's essay (p. 184). Kohlhauser ends his paper by arguing that the spirit of Maistre's counter-revolution and Marcuse's anti-establishment libertarianism were similarly impotent gestures of protest in the face of an omnipotent reality. But this is surely wrong. When Maistre was writing, the new order established by the Revolution and Napoleon was not well-rooted and was being assaulted from many directions. A religiously-based counter-revolutionary tide was on the rise throughout Europe and would soon become consolidated in the institutions of the Restoration. Compared to the power of what Arno Meyer called the persistence of the old regime, 1968 was a flash in the pan. [7]

The fate of Maistre's thought in Italy is the subject of Marco Ravera's study of Maistre's possible influence on a little-known strain of late twentieth-century Piedmontese religious philosophy. Ravera points out that Italians ignored Maistre throughout the nineteenth century and only rediscovered him in the 1960s, when Maistre's intuitions of what later came to be called the dialectic of Enlightenment and his "prophetic vision of the danger of totalitarianism as a violent implosion of instrumental and logical reason abandoned to itself" made him seem like a contemporary (p. 196). Ravera surveys the growing historiographical and documentary interest in Maistre but concentrates most of his efforts on determining the precise nature of Maistre's influence on a small group of religious thinkers and a philosophico-religious tradition "whose basic components can be identified as ontologism and pessimism" (p. 202). After characterizing ontologism as the affirmation of a "cognitive immediate relation between God and man," Ravera goes on to analyze the figures associated with the movement--

Augusto Del Noce, Luigi Pareyson, Carol Mazzantini, Guisepppe Riconda—to show how their philosophy intersects with a number of “genuinely” Maistrian themes (p. 202). Ravera does not intend to present Piedmontese religious thought as a direct Maistrian legacy. His goal is to “investigate whether it is possible to discover an underground presence of Maistre (in the way one can, so to say, see a watermark only when the paper is held up to the light): a Maistre who is, by the way, quite rarely recalled or cited” (p. 204).

Armenteros’ own contribution builds on Maistre’s well-known role as educational advisor to Tsar Alexander I. Her aim is to reconstruct the “long-term and more indirect influence” that Maistre exercised on Russian education by studying the letters that Maistre sent to Sergei Uvarov from 1810 and 1814 (p. 213). Uvarov was appointed Deputy Minister of Public Education in 1832 and is most notably associated with the formation of the doctrine of Official Nationality under Czar Nicholas I. Armenteros uses Maistre’s letters (Uvarov’s did not survive) to demonstrate a common interest in theories of knowledge inspired by the Oriental Renaissance, pioneered by German scholars in the eighteenth-century, and claims that Maistre’s influence on Uvarov contributed to the fashioning of an educational system in Russia that helped create conditions that led to the Revolution of 1917. Armenteros contends that the content of the Maistre/Uvarov correspondence bore directly on contemporary debates surrounding Russian national identity and occurred at a time when Maistre was working to defend Catholic religious equality and a classical curriculum for Russian schools in opposition to the policies of Mikhail Speransky.

At the time, Maistre saw in Uvarov’s proposal for an Asian Academy dedicated to studying the Indian roots of European religion and civilization a promising, if indirect means of revitalizing Russian culture. The letters reveal a number of points of agreement between Uvarov and Maistre but also contain a critique of Uvarov’s ideas that Armenteros insists were “interiorized” by Uvarov, to the extent that he went on to institute a curriculum which substantially incorporated Maistre’s priorities (p. 245). As a result, according to Armenteros, Maistre had a direct and indirect impact on Russian social, political, and educational developments that helped produce an intelligentsia of unemployed intellectuals trained in theology, literature, and the classics, one that went on to “[constitute] the disaffected base of the Revolution of 1917” (p. 245).

There are two problems here that are typical of the entire collection: the overvaluation of intellectual causes and the absolute determination to assert Maistre’s historical and contemporary relevance. Armenteros fails to note that there were educational reforms and social changes in Russia after the reign of Nicholas I and that not all countries that retained a substantially classical secondary curriculum produced a class analogous to the Russian intelligentsia. Similarly, in his epilogue, José Miguel Nanni Soares struggles to inflate the importance of Maistre’s ideas by contrasting the scant attention received by the *Considérations sur la France* from both historians and the public in the nineteenth and twentieth century with what he sees as elements in the contemporary historiography of the French Revolution that tend to vindicate Maistre’s interpretation of the Revolution. He claims that Maistre’s thesis on the role of Protestantism in causing the French Revolution gains confirmation from Dale Van Kley’s study of the Jansenist opposition to absolutism, as if Van Kley had argued that the Jansenist opposition was part of the accumulation of evil for which the Revolution was expiation. He declares that Maistre cannot be indicted “for giving too much to Providence in his reading of the Revolution” (p. 261) because William Doyle and Darrin McMahon have shown that the Revolution was primarily an attack on religion.[8] And he insists that the *Considérations* ought to be seen “as an essay in modern social science” because it “subsumed the revolutionary phenomenon in a metaphysical plan,” even though its thesis can never be tested (p. 262).

The contrast between the editors’ exaggerated claims about Maistre’s intellectual influence and the evidence provided in the collection concerning his spotty and elusive reception tend to undermine the

argument that Maistre was an immensely important and widely-read thinker. Armenteros asserts that Maistre has a “colossally assorted European descent” (p. 10) and that “[t]hinkers across Europe and the political spectrum used Maistre to refashion the politics-religion rapport to address similar problems in their own times” (p. 265), but most of Maistre’s readers studied here either tried to drain Maistre’s thought of its religious content (Comte, Benjamin, Marcuse) or disagreed with its most explicit aspects (Gentz, Novalis, Schegel, Baader, Uvarov). Armenteros insists on the relevance of the *Considérations* “as a piece of historiography with hermeneutical and polemical values” which “scholars used in the present to argue politically about the future” (p. 275), but Soares never said that the contemporary historians he mentions read Maistre and called the supposed analogies between Maistre’s ideas and their arguments mere “echoes” (p. 249).

Maistrian thought may have responded to the concerns of a pan-European readership, especially during the Napoleonic Wars and the era of the Holy Alliance, but the collection does not unambiguously show that interest in Maistre was either bountiful or consistent. If Maistre provoked widespread interest in England, there is no evidence here; lack of interest among Italians was “total for a long time” (p. 193); and it is not clearly demonstrated that the early German Romantics, Benjamin, or Marcuse used Maistre as a theoretical guide. Claims about Maistre’s influence often rest on methodologically questionable rhetoric about genealogical relationships, convergences, similarities, analogies, and second-hand derivations that make it hard to determine the precise nature of the speculative and critical role of Maistre’s works in the modes of reasoning and discursive practices of his readers.[9] For example, Daub’s argument about Maistre’s connection to the German Romantics rests largely on the notion that the latter were in “critical dialogue” with a line of thought very much like Bonald’s (p. 126).

Kageura’s thesis relies on a concept of indirect influence based on remote textual intersessions that may have taken place between historically disconnected but parallel themes. Kohlhauer imagines the real and profound interest that Marcuse had in Maistre’s work, but admits that it is “difficult to say” when and through what means Marcuse encountered Maistre’s writing, apart from the former’s knowledge of the classics and his status as “a tireless reader of immense culture” (p. 171-173). Ravera characterizes Maistre’s influence on the Italian philosophers he studies as simultaneously hidden and vague, undeveloped, not explicitly declared, and “very strong” (p. 201). One wonders whether this sort of intertextual reading based on historically diffuse and generalized family resemblances stretches the interpretative efficacy of the idea of intellectual influence well beyond the contextualizing methods and practices of the Cambridge School—dear to Armenteros—which tries to place an author’s ideas in proximate relationship to the discourses and debates with which his or her texts intersect.

The editors’ central claim that Maistre was “abundantly utilized” (p. 5) by thinkers on the left responds to the necessity to revitalize and expand the scope and purview of Maistrian studies by presenting him as a thinker who transcends political boundaries. One is astonished to discover that Maistre’s politics are not easy to categorize posthumously and that he “does not belong to the right forever” (p. 268), especially when a majority of the contributors are comfortable labeling him as a conservative, a counter-revolutionary, or a reactionary. Why is it so important to claim that “Maistre has been significant to European readers of all stripes” (p. 275)? It seems to me that Armenteros and Lebrun see Maistre as a vehicle for bringing anti-Enlightenment currents of thought into the practice of history to make greater room for religious thinking in a discipline that is still overwhelming secular. They would like to promote the resurgence of religious factors in modern political, historical, and philosophical analysis in order to assert that the choice between faith and its absence is both present in history and has speculative value for contemporary thought. As the editors point out, Maistre’s goal was to revitalize religion, to instrumentalize it, and refashion it as an agent of social reintegration so that Christianity would become a force in the public sphere and a political weapon against the ideologies that opposed it. This cannot happen if Maistre is ignored because he continues to have a bad reputation and is not taken

as seriously as befits his “legitimate and proper place in intellectual history” (p. 59), hence the imperative to take on Isaiah Berlin.

But there are problems with the critique of Berlin’s essay that make it hard to put his thesis entirely to rest. Let me concede at the outset that I find Berlin’s argument about Maistre’s responsibility for fascism misleading, anachronistic, and ahistorical. It is also bad intellectual history because it assumes that ideas and attitudes detach themselves from their immediate historical context and float through time in order to culminate in movements and ideologies fashioned by intervening factors under remote conditions. Even if Maistre is part of the same tradition that gave rise to Vichy, Mussolini, and Hitler—a connection which a number of the contributors to this collection simply reject—Berlin makes little effort to show that actual fascists devoted much energy to considering the relevance of Maistre’s ideas. Moreover, Berlin muddles his argument by linking Maistre’s “deeply pessimistic” vision of the world to totalitarianisms of both right and left; by relating his critique of the artificial language of the *philosophes* to Orwell’s *1984*; and by affirming that “Maistre condemns naked militarism again and again.” [10]

At the same time, Berlin is not the only scholar to draw parallels between fascist and Maistrian ideas, as many of these essays show, and fascists themselves have sometimes embraced the association. Ravera tells us that Catholic apologetics and fascist totalitarians “could take possession of Maistre and make him their own champion” (p. 197) and Soares points out that from the early twentieth century onward Maistre was narrowly identified with Action Française, which regularly listed him as one of *nos maîtres* and made selective use of his writings in their publications (p. 255-258). What are we to make of such elective affinities? Are there not compelling elements of Maistre’s thought that recall fascist doctrines, like the mystification of authority, the use of myth and terror in modern politics, and the denunciation of rational criticism in the political sphere, the description of which constitute the most arresting parts of Berlin’s essay? As Erwin suggests, Maistre was a hero of anti-modernity whose ideas played a constitutive role in shaping the anti-rationalist, anti-modernist Counter-Enlightenment from which fascism (among other things) eventually emerged (p. 63). The authors might have strengthened their case that Maistre matters and was widely read if they had not been so eager to demolish the traditional depiction of him as an authoritarian reactionary and by including some of his many right-wing readers, like Juan Donoso Cortés, Louis de Bonald, Charles Maurras, Carl Schmitt, Léon Daudet, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, and a whole slew of Iberian traditionalists. [11]

The Maistre that most of us know is not a precursor of fascism but one of the founders of post-revolutionary conservatism, along with Edmund Burke and Louis de Bonald. The generally accepted view in France is that Maistre and Bonald built the doctrinal foundations of the extreme right and inaugurated a tradition that, for all its variations, ran from the Ultras to Vichy and the National Front, by way of Charles Maurras. [12] Even if one accepts the validity of such a continuous tradition, it is always hazardous to evoke the fascist label in the French context, where the question of the existence of fascism is still contested. Many of the contributors to the collection seem comfortable characterizing Maistre as a reactionary, a critic of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, a counter-revolutionary propagandist, a defender of throne and altar, a proponent of papal authority, and a vigorous champion of traditional beliefs and institutions. Soares agrees with Doyle that Maistre “brought to life an entire political perspective on the right” and with Pierre Manent, who argued that the *Considérations* “founded the tradition of reaction, or the Counter-revolution” (p. 263-64).

And yet, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Maistre was not widely read on the French Right, from René Rémond, who doubted the Ultras and the legitimists ever picked up his books or cared about theory in general, and from Armenteros herself, who noted that the “monarchists of the Restoration whose cause [Maistre] pleaded rarely turned to his writings for reflection, or even for propaganda.” [13] According to Ariane Chebel d’Appollonia, extreme-right wing doctrines in France had undergone a profound modification since the early nineteenth century, as “the first theoreticians

were forgotten or reinterpreted.” The political tradition they represented became increasingly anachronistic and faded to irrelevance shortly after the founding of the Third Republic.[14] In this light, it seems important to ask whether Maistre still deserves the stature of founder of French counter-revolutionary conservatism if he has been largely ignored? What place ought we to assign Joseph de Maistre in the history of French conservatism? The lack of convincing work on this subject is not the fault of Berlin, and it is a question that Armenteros does not raise, even if she sometimes concedes that Maistre was a conservative, because she sees him as “a conservative apart” (p. 5), the assessment of whom “requires ceasing to think of him primarily as the defender of a political position” (p. 265). Moreover, she denies that he was “an archetype of French conservatism” on the basis of a definition of conservatism that encompasses only reactionaries who wanted to revive the Old Regime (p. 266). But this was not even true of the Ultras, as was recently demonstrated by Emmanuel de Waresquiel, or the legitimists, whose entire movement was based on the premise that the Old Regime had been riddled with abuses and that monarchical France had to be reinvented because the Revolution had uprooted a usable past.[15]

The biggest irony of all is that, in re-reading Maistre, both Berlin and Armenteros have arrived at a number of new and complementary positions. Both emphasize the centrality of his theodicy and his originality as a historical thinker. Both see him as a forward-thinking modernist who combatted the *philosophes* with their own weapons and acknowledged that “the old world was dying” [16] and that the Revolution “had transformed European society and politics in ways that could not be undone” (p. 266). Both believe that he was a revolutionary activist who wanted to change the world and who ascribed to humanity the freedom and responsibility to do so. Both argue that he was a realistic observer of his own time who rejected *a priori* formulas of human nature in favor of an empiricist approach to understanding the workings of providence and the course of history. Both, finally, believe that his importance has been underestimated and that his ideas have had a dominant influence on a broad array of modern political and religious concepts.

Where they differ most profoundly is in their assessment of the historical trajectory of those ideas, and therein lay the politics of this book: Berlin, the liberal philosopher, sees Maistre as the source of a tradition of political thought leading to fascism, and Armenteros, Maistre’s sympathetic intellectual biographer, sees his critique of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution as unmasking the totalitarian potential of his adversaries.

In her conclusion, Armenteros recapitulates the content of the essays in the collection and gives them a consistently Maistrian reading. She is satisfied with Blamires’ demonstration that Maistre was alien to fascism and insists that Sandoval convincingly shows that the papacy’s Christian spiritual authority played a central role in making Europe stable, free, and unique. Erwin’s study of Barbey reveals Maistre’s talents as a prophetic historian and Cahen’s portrait of Gentz helps make the point that Christianity “was the religion of liberty without rebellion, the gentle yoke on the mutinous people of a continent destined for restlessness” (p. 270). Daub demonstrates that the German Romantics “devised their politics of freedom” by drawing inspiration from the Francophone Counter-revolution and Kageura underscores how the Revolution created a modernity that “objectified people” and turned paranoia and sociopathy into a lifestyle (p. 273). Kohlhauer’s Marcuse found in Maistre a theoretically useful guide to how the “absurdities and tragedies” engendered by revolutions become established in post-revolutionary regimes (p. 273) and Ravera shows how Maistre can be seen as having inspired a version of European unity that “speaks to those today who would like to see the continent united on other grounds” and “who wish that the links between persons could be rendered more solid by religion or other shared values” (p. 274). With regard to her own essay, Armenteros seeks to emphasize that Maistre’s idea of freedom “animated by religious and educational autonomy” was eschewed in favor of an educational system “overseen by an autocrat” and responsible for the Revolution of 1917 (p. 274). She ends by declaring that obedience to Christian law in Europe has always insured good government, and that its rejection has always brought insurrection and tyranny, as in the days of the Terror or under the

rule of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes of the right and the left. In short, Armenteros has her own ideas about the origins of fascism.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Carolina Armenteros and Richard A. Lebrun, "Introduction"

Jean-Louis Darcel, "Memento"

Cyprian Blamires, "Berlin, Maistre, and Fascism"

Kevin Michael Erwin, "*Le mystique de la tradition*: Barbey Worships at the Altar of Joseph de Maistre"

Tonatiuh Useche Sandoval, "August Comte's Reading of Maistre's *Du pape*: Two Theories of Spiritual Authority"

Raphaël Cahen, "The Correspondence of Friedrich von Gentz: The Reception of *Du pape* in the German-speaking World"

Adrian Daub, "All Evil is the Cancellation of Unity': Joseph de Maistre and Late German Romanticism"

Ryohei Kageura, "Maistrian Themes in Walter Benjamin's Sociology"

Michael Kohlhauser, "A Dialectical Reading of Joseph de Maistre by Herbert Marcuse"

Marco Ravera, "Joseph de Maistre and Italy"

Carolina Armenteros, "Preparing the Russian Revolution: Maistre and Uvarov on the History of Knowledge"

José Miguel Nanni Soares, "Epilogue: The Reception of Maistre's *Considérations sur la France*"

Carolina Armenteros, "Conclusion"

NOTES

[1] Lebrun's principal works include Richard Lebrun, *Throne and Altar: The Political and Religious Thought of Joseph de Maistre* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1965) and Richard Lebrun, *Joseph de Maistre: An Intellectual Militant* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988). He is also editor and translator of *The Works of Joseph de Maistre*, an online data base of English translations of the writings of Joseph de Maistre.

[2] Carolina Armenteros and Richard A. Lebrun, *Joseph de Maistre and the Legacy of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011); Carolina Armenteros and Richard Lebrun, *The New 'enfant du siècle': Joseph de Maistre as a Writer* (St. Andrews: Centre for French History and Culture of the University of St Andrews, 2010); Carolina Armenteros, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and His Heirs, 1794-1854* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[3] Robert Triomphe, *Joseph de Maistre: Étude sur la vie et sur la doctrine d'un matérialiste mystique* (Geneva: Droz, 1968).

[4] The definitive version of Berlin's "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism" can be found in Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[5] J. L. Talmon, *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970).

[6] Cahen writes that Gentz did not succeed directly in propagating Maistre's ideas but that he was able to promote them indirectly through his role in Metternich's press system and through his political influence, which allowed him to get Maistre's works reviewed and to protect German Catholic and counter-revolutionary writers. He also favored the creation of a counter-revolutionary journal, *Der Staatsmannes*, which saw the light of day in 1831.

[7] Arno Meyer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

[8] Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996); William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[9] I would exempt Blamires, Erwin, Sandoval, and Armenteros from this criticism, although in her recent book on Maistre, Armenteros addressed this issue by cautioning that we ought not to be too fussy about "the precise mode of transmission." "The connection between Maistre and his historical philosophical heirs is sometimes indirect and not always clear, both because nineteenth-century authors did not always indicate their sources with scruple, and because the traditionalism he professed lent itself easily to intellectual borrowing without acknowledgement. As Christ's humble warriors, traditionalists were not supposed to wish to gain fame, which sometimes makes it difficult or impossible to identify which ideas Maistre's successors drew from him and which they took from the vast trove of traditionalism that he helped found...I have underlined his direct or indirect influence on nineteenth-century writers wherever I have been able to verify it, which is in almost all cases. Otherwise, I have assumed convergence." Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, p. 18.

[10] Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, pp. 127, 143, 146.

[11] The editors justify their choice in part by pointing out that "extreme-rightists represent a small minority of Maistre's readers," as measured by the 150 interpreters of Maistre included in Philippe Barthelet's *Joseph de Maistre: Le dossiers H* (Geneva: L'Age d'Homme, 2005). I found a few more rightists in Barthelet's book than Armenteros and Lebrun.

[12] See Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia, *L'extrême-droite en France de Maurras à Le Pen* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 1996).

[13] René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France from 1815 to De Gaulle*, translated by James M. Laux (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966); Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, p. 14.

[14] Chebel d'Appollonia, *L'extrême-droite en France*, pp. 16, 30.

[15] See Emmanuel de Waresquiel, *Histoire de la restauration* (Paris: Perrin, 2002); Steven D. Kale, *Legitimism and the Reconstruction of French Society, 1852-1883* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

[16] Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 102.

Steven Kale
Washington State University
kale@wsu.edu

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