

## Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Jack Heywood's review of Carolina Armenteros, *The French Idea of History. Joseph de Maistre and his heirs, 1794-1854* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2011).

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<http://www.h-france.net/vol13reviews/vol13no117hayward.pdf>

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Years have passed since I published my first book, and I have by now become well accustomed to reading reviews of my work, with all the exciting and unsettling moments that this experience can bring. I have to say, however, that I have never gone through anything resembling the shock that came to me on reading the two reviews that have so far appeared on H-France of two of my volumes: the one on my monograph, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and his Heirs, 1794-1854* (Cornell, 2011) (*H-France Review* Vol. 13, no. 117), which was circulated last month, and another of one of my co-edited collections, *Joseph de Maistre and his European Readers: From Friedrich von Gentz to Isaiah Berlin* (Brill, 2011) (*H-France Review* Vol. 12, no 92), which appeared last year. I have been shocked not only by how incredibly bad both reviews are—they are by far the worst that have been published on my work so far—but also by how very similar they are in tone and way of proceeding. Concretely, both quote from my texts out of context in order to distort them, and more precisely to describe books that do not actually exist. The common purpose seems to be, firstly, to suggest that Maistre was a dire theocrat—an aspect of his thought I have tried *not* to highlight in my work, both because it has been done to death and because the excessive focus placed upon it has obscured other, much more interesting aspects of his writings that one can learn from and study. Secondly, both of H-France's reviewers of my work seem exceptionally keen to construe me as Maistre's "advocate," not in the scholarly sense that I think he was a complex and frequently misunderstood intellectual figure whose legacy must be re-examined, but in the ideological sense that I share his ideas, so that I am, in a sense, his intellectual incarnation, a sort of early twenty-first century ideological caricature of him. Last year's reviewer went so far as to present my summary of Maistre's thought as constituting my own belief system!!!

This year's reviewer has gone even further. "Carolina Armenteros," he writes without so much as an attempt at proof, "endorses the Lamennais-Lacordaire view of the "[sic] demise of nineteenth century French historical thought: 'Dehistoricisation is the corollary of de-Christianisation.'" The quotation, taken out of context—like every single quotation in this

review—suggests that, as far as I am concerned, one cannot think about history outside of a Christian framework. Yet if one actually reads the paragraph on pp. 311-312 of *The French Idea of History* from which this quotation is lifted, it becomes clear that I am discussing only the philosophy of history of Lamennais!! And that I am claiming simply that as he departed from Christianity, he lost interest in the historical thought he had elaborated as a Christian.

I will not dwell on the possible reasons for using this type of technique, which has no place in responsible scholarship. I wish only to make clear that I am not shocked because my work has been criticized, or because my reviewers disagree with me: principle and experience have both made me well aware that criticisms and disagreements are the very life of scholarly debate, and that when well supported and fairly developed and argued, they can constitute quite productive and inspiring stimuli for one's work. Rather, I am shocked that fellow scholars could misrepresent my work to the point of assuring the public, and of potentially persuading uninformed readers, that I have written works and expressed attitudes that are completely unrecognizable to me, and that I hold opinions thoroughly contrary to my personal beliefs and aims as a scholar. One of the things I had sought to achieve with *The French Idea of History* was to contextualize Maistre's thought in such a way as to show precisely when, how and why this man who had initially welcomed the French Revolution as an opportunity for reform too long delayed, and this avid reader and bibliophile who was steeped in the same enlightened thought as his future enemies, had decided to part ways with the Revolution. The exercise was if anything intended to take off the ideological blinders with which people have frequently written about Maistre, blinders that the reviewers of my work on H-France affect to put back on.

This is not to say, however, that Jack Hayward, the reviewer of *The French Idea of History*, has not been innovative, for he has done what reviewers usually never do, and that is suggest his lack of familiarity with the subject he is reviewing. In the only semblance of a positive comment Hayward makes—and it is a poor semblance because it is actually an insult, since it suggests that I parrot other scholars rather than contribute to knowledge originally on my own—he states that “this book usefully allows those of us who have turned our attention elsewhere to familiarise ourselves with some of [the research that has flourished on Maistre] at second hand.” One wonders whether Hayward includes himself among those who have “turned [their] attention elsewhere”—and if so, what he is doing reviewing this book—but in the opening paragraph of his text he seems eager to leave no doubt on the subject, since he devotes it to describing what he heard Isaiah Berlin say about Maistre “some sixty years ago.” Aside from the fact that, as he readily volunteers, the information is rather dated, the crude caricature that Berlin drew of Maistre as a reactionary enemy of the human race has been abundantly deconstructed and dismissed in Maistrian studies—as anyone familiar with the work of Graeme Garrard and Cyprian Blamires will know[1]—and is understandable largely as Berlin's empirically unsustainable attempt to relieve the trauma occasioned by World War II by finding a thinker to lynch for the Holocaust. Incidentally, and regaling though Hayward may intend his anecdote to be, it is rather spoiled by the fact that the last sentence of his first paragraph remains inscrutable because he has apparently forgotten to find a main verb or verbal phrase for it.

What is certain is that Hayward likes to dwell on the image of Maistre's executioner, the subject of a mere two paragraphs from the *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* (1821) that Maistre's critics have loved to quote *ad nauseam* and out of context for centuries in an attempt to prove his

inhumanity. The fact of the matter, though, is that it was Maistre's horror of violence—evident, as Antoine Compagnon points out, in the Savoyard's correspondence[2]—which motivated the *Soirées*' discussion of the “inexplicable being” of the executioner. This figure is best understood in light of the contribution made to the sociology of violence by Maistre, whose *éclaircissement sur les sacrifices* (1821) constitutes the first text of the discipline. In it, he posits that human societies develop ritualized forms of sacrifice and punishment—including execution—in order to cohere, as well as to minimize and channel violence. While heavily exoticized by those who like to excite their imaginations, these ideas are less foreign than they seem, and if they are disturbing in any way, it is less by Maistre's untold uniqueness, than by the deep hold they retain in our culture. In their instrumental aspects, for instance, they resemble the argument by deterrence still made by advocates of the death penalty in the United States, while in their theme of reintegration, they recall the “closure” that today's victims' families seek when assisting to the execution of the condemned.

Hopefully Hayward is now satisfied: Maistre's executioner has been discussed—*again*. I wonder, though, how many times a discussion of Maistre's executioner has been published before. My guess is at least hundreds of times, possibly thousands if one counts languages other than English and French, so that at this point if the subject is broached, it should be so for specific purposes that are both useful and new, since it can no longer be mentioned merely for the sake of novelty, and even less in order to argue that Maistre was a reactionary.

But Hayward is not content to ignore my work in order to focus on the tired, if not thoroughly exhausted, theme of the executioner. Instead of giving the reader a summary of my argument—the basic task of all reviewers—he prefers to populate his paragraphs with random quotations from my work where Maistre appears at his most theocratic. Hayward is willing even to hurt his own writing in order to carry out this exercise in misleading haphazardness. His paragraphs, especially those of p. 2, lack a main idea; his sentences are connected only by the general theme that my work is bad; his examples refer solely to minor details unrelated to my main argument. He accuses me of making a “rather confusing conflation of Swedenborg and Mesmer, whose ideas were very different,” even though all I do is identify the “Mesmerists” as “Swedenborg's heirs” in passing (p. 200). Nor does Hayward even bother to justify his observations. He chides me for making only a “passing allusion” to the abbé Grégoire, who is certainly an interesting figure; but why should I have discussed him or analysed his *Histoire des sectes religieuses*? It was unnecessary for my purposes, and the reader would know this if Hayward had taken the trouble to describe my argument and summarize my book.

Further random accusations concerning minor details continue to stand in lieu of a description of *The French Idea of History*. It seems that I should have taken Maistre to task for “theocratic enormities” like his claim that “humanity is naturally Christian;” but unlike Hayward, I am less interested in bashing dead (and living) people than in trying to learn new and useful things from them, and if I were to scold past thinkers like Maistre for every statement they made that is judged politically incorrect by our present standards, I would have no other occupation for my time as a historian, and few opportunities to actually examine their thought. Hayward also claims that I contradict myself when I say both that Maistre and Staël had “mutual respect” for each other, and that he thought her head “completely perverted;” but he quotes me out of context to the point of omitting that I point this tension out precisely in the very sentence where I give the

information, describing Maistre's conflicting feelings about Staël. I write: "although Maistre harbored great respect and even affection for 'science in petticoat,' as he jokingly referred to [Staël], he also wrote that she was the most 'completely perverted head' he had ever encountered" (p. 112). Not only that, but on p. 117, which Hayward even refers to, I also offer an explanation for the tension by mentioning that toward the end of his life Maistre "expressed impatience" with Staël when her *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la révolution française* (1818) appeared.

An even more obvious omission occurs when Hayward writes: "Paradox is indulged by phrases like 'Maistre remained true to Bellarmine by overturning him...'" Hayward cuts off the sentence in order to imply that I "indulge" in paradox for the mere sake of indulgence, but had he quoted the sentence in full, the contrary would have been revealed. I write: "Maistre remained true to Bellarmine by overturning him, interpreting the vicarious character of ecclesiastical authority to be primarily significant for rendering the popes just authors of temporal sovereign right" (p. 140). The point I elaborate in the paragraph where this sentence appears is that Maistre used Bellarmine's most anti-papal idea—that the popes were sovereigns only through other sovereigns—to claim that, thanks to this vicariousness, the popes were actually able to *make* sovereigns, an idea that in the end supported the pontificate even more firmly than Bellarmine's generally quite pro-papal work. Maistre, in short, proceeded both paradoxically and productively, and there is nothing indulgent about pointing this out.

What does seem very indulgent is to make my argument sound like its own opposite, all the while suggesting, yet again, that I do but repeat the past—which, quite ironically, is precisely what Hayward himself keeps doing throughout his text whenever he refers to Maistre (with the particularity that the past he draws on is of a rather remote and scaremongering variety). Thus he quotes me to say that "Maistre's epistemology relies on what [I call] humanity's 'inborn knowledge of universals . . . that remain unknown to it until the process of revelation begins.'" This quotation, which addresses the subject of the second chapter of my book—Maistre's theory of knowledge—summarises Maistre's innatism, an aspect of his epistemology that has been well known for a long time. But what it does not mention is that the entire argument of this chapter, and the one that constitutes my original contribution to our knowledge of Maistre's epistemology, is that Maistre combines this innatism with a direct empiricism derived from Hume through Bergier!

The misrepresentations continue. One that is quite consistent with Hayward's apparent obsession with Maistre's theocracy appears in his claim that "Comte's late pseudo-Catholicism minus Christ... owed more to his infatuation with Clothilde de Vaux" than it did to Maistre, a comment that is irrelevant to my argument, since—as the reader will *not* know from Hayward's review—my book seeks to tease out the influence that Maistre exercised on Comte's epistemology, sociology and philosophy of history, not his "pseudo-Catholicism minus Christ"—the appropriate term would have been "Religion of Humanity," not least because Christ actually plays a role in it. By Comte's own admission, Maistre's influence on his thought was both early and foundational, and thus much more formative than that which Clotilde—not Clothilde—might have exercised. As I write, providing three references—and as Hayward again chooses to ignore: "After his break with Saint-Simon, when he was effacing the intellectual impact of his former mentor, Comte declared that the nineteenth-century thinker who most influenced him was

Maistre; that Maistre was the third-greatest influence on him after Gall and Condorcet; and that Maistre and Condorcet were his main political predecessors” (p. 223).

But the prize of distortion must really go to Hayward’s statement that I make the “misleading claim (in which [I follow] many others who have not made a close study of his thought) that Saint-Simon was ‘the father of socialism.’” This strange and unclear complaint derives possibly from the fact that, according to some, the genesis of Saint-Simon’s thought identifies him as an *idéologue*, while in others’ opinion, his influence on the liberals makes of him a father of liberalism. Yet the fact that Saint-Simon was an heir of the *idéologues* and a precursor of the liberals does not mean that he did not contribute to begetting the socialists. Moreover, his identity as a father of socialism is particularly pertinent to my argument, which—as H-France’s readers will again *not* know from reading Hayward’s review—is not concerned with Saint-Simon’s sources or descent except in regard to his philosophy of history, which itself had few—if any—*idéologue* origins or liberal consequences, but which—as I show—certainly inspired socialist musings on the subject. As for the other possible source of Hayward’s complaint—that I put Saint-Simon forward as *the* father of socialism—it is never implied by my usage of the expression, which appears in a sentence simply mentioning “the various laws of alternativity that the father of socialism and his manifold disciples constructed” (p. 317). Indeed the sad fact is that none of this is even relevant to my work, since—in a manner most revealing of Hayward’s methods—he has taken the expression “the father of socialism” from a mere passing mention in the Conclusion, where I use “the father of socialism” for strictly rhetorical reasons, in order not to have to write “Saint-Simon” twice!!

Hayward complains that I do not mention France’s nineteenth-century liberal historians, even though I make it a point to explain in the Introduction that “[t]o make the evidence manageable, I have not dwelled on historiography” (p. 18), and that, when assessing Maistre’s influence, I have concentrated on “the socialists, traditionalists, and positivists who took... up [Maistre’s philosophy of history] during the 1820s and 1830s” (p. 10). If I do not discuss the liberals, it is not because they were not important, but because their historical thought has already been examined and because they do not seem to have been influenced by Maistre’s philosophy of history—which, as H-France’s readers will again *not* know from reading Hayward’s review, is actually the main subject of my book. The title *The French Idea of History* was proposed by Cornell, and I approved of it among other things because it emphasized the philosophical, as opposed to historiographical, approach to history that—though forgotten nowadays—exercised a great influence in France across the political spectrum up until the mid-nineteenth century.

Yet on the subject of Maistre’s influence, too, Hayward is willing to obscure the facts repeatedly for the sake of blaming me consistently. He closes his review by commenting that I would have been “better inspired” to turn to “Maistre’s latter day heirs” like Balzac and Veillot, presumably because they were right-wingers, and Hayward is determined to believe only that “Maistre’s legacy was a reactionary one.” He accuses me of trying to “disguise” this, an accusation that however requires him to cover up the fact that about a third of Part II of *The French Idea of History* is devoted to the influence that Maistre’s philosophy of history exercised on conservative historical thought, and that if this theme of my book is not larger, it is quite simply because there were only so many right-wing philosophies of history of Maistrian derivation in nineteenth-century France.

Despite the plethora of socialist and positivist quotations of Maistre I provide in Part II, Hayward refuses to believe that a thinker can inherit ideas from another thinker unless s/he shares the same political and religious opinions, which is why he seems so aggravated that I mention Proudhon as a reader and admirer of Maistre. Yet the evidence that people, both in the past and nowadays, can and do borrow productively from the work of others whose political opinions and religious sensibilities differ from theirs is so overwhelming that I need provide no proof of it here. And if the philosophers of history who engaged most extensively with Maistre's thought were not on the right, but on the left, that is because of the enlightened sources of Maistre's thought, which—as again H-France's readers will *not* know from reading Hayward's review—Part I of my book recovers. My main concern to trace the fate of ideas in turn explains why I do not mention that Saint-Simon and Thierry were personally closer to Staël than they were to Maistre, as Hayward blames me for not doing, since my purpose in discussing Saint-Simon and Thierry is not to draw up a list of their friends, but to discern how they drew upon and transformed the historical-philosophical tradition represented by Maistre.

Ignoring the argument of my book, though, serves Hayward well, since it allows him to make one last absurd accusation—that I focus on the Saint-Simonians who developed a philosophy of history, Enfantin and Rodrigues, as opposed to those who, in Hayward's opinion, “went on to make French history”—Leroux and Chevalier. Since the book is entitled *The French Idea of History*, and since he has not bothered to summarize it, it might be possible, Hayward hopes, to lead readers to believe that this is a book about people who made French history, as opposed to French people who thought and wrote about history, and that his accusation therefore makes sense.

In short, this “review,” which reads less like a review than like a list of *enormities*, leaves me in the regrettable state of being completely unable to comment positively upon it in any way. I cannot express how saddening it is for me to have to write in these terms. When my collaborators and I replied to last year's review of *Joseph de Maistre and his European Readers*, we were at least able to thank the reviewer for the unprecedented length of the review, for the thought he had devoted to it, and for his knowledge of the literature. But I have no such recourse this year. Hayward makes it a point to advertise his lack of knowledge of the subject; he packs his short text densely with accusations that he takes no trouble to justify, forcing me to unpack them in detail and at length; he flaunts his indifference by not even finishing his first paragraph; he affirms that Christ was absent from Comte's Religion of Humanity although the contrary was the case; he avers that Lamartine called Maistre “an exterminating mind, written in blood,” as if this were a phrase that one could make sense of, and then highlights the non-sense by failing to provide the reference it needs.

I end here, hoping that Hayward is satisfied that I have not “ignored” the “adversary” he has constructed himself as being, and that it would never have occurred to me could arise in response to what colleagues have described as a “revisionist” yet “deeply researched” book. My project has not been to conceal Maistre the conservative or the theocrat. It has been to bring to light Maistre the philosopher of history, the chafing heir of the Enlightenment, the modern thinker who owed much more to the contemporary writers he disparaged than to the medieval and ancient authors he praised—and who became even more of a modern as time went on. His

intellectual ascent, moreover, was consistent with his intellectual descent, since as I also show, the left ended up taking an even greater interest in his historical thought than the right, and helped to make him into a key figure of early nineteenth-century French historical thought.

The unfortunate fact remains, however, that after all this H-France's readers have not yet received so much as a summary of *The French Idea of History*. I therefore take the liberty of referring them to the most accurate exposition of it I can think of—it itself—and to the most faithful summary of my views—including my much-decried “advocacy”—its Introduction (provided under “Excerpt”):

<http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100846270>

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#### NOTES

[1] See Graeme Garrard, “Isaiah Berlin’s Joseph de Maistre,” in Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler, eds., *Isaiah Berlin’s Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2003), pp. 117–31 and Cyprian Blamires, “Berlin, Maistre, and Fascism,” Carolina Armenteros and Richard Lebrun, eds., *Joseph de Maistre and his European Readers: From Friedrich von Gentz to Isaiah Berlin* (Studies in the History of Political Thought, no. 5, Leiden and New York: Brill, 2011), pp. 19-48.

[2] Antoine Compagnon, *Les antimodernes: De Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 117.