

Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Steven Kale's review 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).

H-France Review Vol. 12 (August 2012), No. 92

The original review may be found on the H-France web page at:

<http://www.h-france.net/vol12reviews/vol12no92kale.pdf>

24 August 2012

Richard Lebrun, University of Manitoba

drichardlebrun@gmail.com

What follows is the editors' reply – including contributors' observations – to Steven Kale's review of our volume, *Joseph de Maistre and his European Readers: From Friedrich von Gentz to Isaiah Berlin*, which was published recently in *H-France Review* (vol. 12, #92). At 12 pages, Professor Kale's is one the lengthiest reviews of a book we remember seeing on this forum, so we would like to thank him very much for having devoted such extensive and serious attention to our work. We are also appreciative of his detailed exposition, thoughtful argumentation and familiarity with the literature on our field. Unfortunately, however, length of exposition has been accompanied by inaccuracy of reporting, and the review contains enough errors that we feel a reply is necessary.

We begin with the one error that it does not depend on us to prove, and by assuring the readers of H-France that Raphaël Cahen is not a woman.

Also, contrary to the impression that might emerge from Kale's exposition, the editors do not share the political opinions of the nineteenth-century thinkers discussed in the volume. Thus, Carolina Armenteros does not “[declare] 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” (pp. 9-10). Rather, she ends by stating that “in Maistrian thought... whether insurrection or freedom prevailed in Europe depended on whether Christian law was obeyed or abandoned” (p. 276). And she follows this paraphrase with the observation that “the terroristic political tradition that Maistre and his fellow conservatives identified, prophesied, and denounced deployed itself further and further until it became incarnated within totalitarian regimes of the left and right” – a restatement of a well-known secular argument (most famously made by Jacob Talmon) tracing twentieth-century totalitarian regimes to the Jacobin Terror. The paraphrase of Maistre's thought in the first quote should not be conflated with the observation that follows it to aver, as Kale has done, that Armenteros “has her own ideas about the origins of fascism.” Neither she, nor Richard Lebrun, nor any of the contributors to this volume are

theocrats.

Kale's claim that Armenteros and Lebrun have "[chosen] 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" (p. 1) is likewise inaccurate. We state that "Circumstances have prevented us from covering certain areas of Europe like Scandinavia, Central and Eastern Europe (excepting Russia...), and the Iberian Peninsula. The latter deserves to be explored especially, given that Maistre was mostly read there by traditionalists whose thought founded the regionalist ideologies that play a role so central in Spanish politics today" (pp. 3-4). The authors, in short, are not ***choosing*** to exclude regions, but rather expressing a regret that circumstances have prevented them from including more. Also, the volume is not "ignoring Maistre's reception among traditionalists," since it comprises an essay by Kevin Erwin on Barbey d'Aureville, perhaps the French nineteenth century's greatest champion of tradition.

It is also not correct to say, as Kale does, that "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" (p. 1). The aim, rather, is to "show the very different portraits of Maistre that can be drawn by focusing on Maistrian interpreters who did not support the rise of totalitarianism" (p. 5). Such interpreters could readily include representatives of "Catholic conservatism and authoritarian ideologies," such as, for instance, Barbey, Schlegel, Uvarov and Marcuse, all writers studied in the collection.

On p. 3, with regard to Cahen's article, Kale mistakenly claims that according to Cahen, "Gentz... grew more conservative and more open to religious issues... as a result of his relations with French Ultras with whom he shared a common view of Metternich's foreign policy." Quite on the contrary, Cahen argues that if Gentz became more conservative in 1819, it was certainly not due to his relations with the Ultras, since Gentz had disagreed with the Ultras in 1815 and also after 1819. This fact is pointed out by the volume's conclusion, which claims that "Gentz was not a reactionary in the sense that he had no desire to rewind time, to return to an old regime (like the Ultras') that existed only in nostalgic dreams" (p. 270).

Also, contrary to Kale's claim, "Cahen [does not speculate] that Gentz heard about *Du pape* through his alliance with French monarchists and as a participant in a trans-national network of conservative publicists" (p. 3). Rather, Cahen ***shows*** that Gentz mentioned Maistre in the *Tagebücher* before 1820 so it is clear that Gentz had read Maistre's *Considerations* before 1820. Opposite also to Kale's statement, Cahen also shows that Gentz was already acquainted with Maistre's works before he read *Du pape* but that it was *Du pape* that made him re-read the other works in a new context. We would like to underline that Cahen provides clear evidence in his article that it was *Du pape* and other Maistrian works and ideas which drove Gentz in the year 1820 to what he perceived to be the most important cause he pursued as a diplomat – Europe's unity. So, to quote Kale again, it is indeed the case that "Gentz used Maistre to think through issues that were particularly important to him," especially the unity of Europe.

Kale's comment, on p. 7 of the review, to the effect that Gentz disagreed with the most explicit aspects of Maistre's thought, is also wrong. As Cahen shows in his article there are multiple similarities in the thoughts and ideas of the two thinkers and Gentz does not disagree with the

most explicit aspects of Maitre's thought.

In note 6 of p.11, Kale also made a mistake. *Der Staatsmannes* did not see the light in 1831 but in 1822. 1831 ***is the year that the journal ceased to be published***. As Cahen shows in his article, Gentz did not succeed in publishing his own translation of Maistre's *Du pape* but he did propagandise directly Maistre's ideas through his networks.

In regard to Kohlhauer's article, we disagree with Kale's opinion that it is "surely wrong" to compare "Maistre's counter-revolution and Marcuse's anti-establishment libertarianism" (p. 5). Certainly, during Maistre's time a "religiously based counter-revolutionary tide was on the rise throughout Europe" leading to the Restoration of former regimes. But was this the kind of political issue Maistre was expecting or even hoping to happen? Of course not: proofs abound for his radical political pessimism, e.g. his letters to Bonald. Furthermore, like Marcuse, and as attested in the *Saint Petersburg Dialogues* (1821), Maistre was expecting a utopia at the end of time. Yet even these are secondary issues, since the point of Kohlhauer's paper is to sort out Marcuse's point of view, not Maistre's.

On p. 6, with regard to the article by Armenteros, Kale states that "The letters [from Maistre to Uvarov] 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. 6). On the contrary, Armenteros argues that Maistre and Uvarov disagreed on substantial points that were probably responsible for the end of their correspondence, but that their common exploration of issues regarding knowledge at a formative period in Uvarov's life probably influenced his establishment of a Russian classical curriculum in later years. Kale observes that "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" (p. 6). Armenteros' aim, however, is to reconstruct Maistre's influence on Russian education, not to elucidate all the educational factors that contributed to 1917 – a subject which could be satisfactorily explored only in another essay and by a Russianist. Also, in exposing Maistre and Uvarov's providentialism – their conviction that the state had to concentrate on forming good minds, and that God would provide for the rest by ensuring the fulfillment of social needs – she provides one reason in addition to the classical curriculum for why Russia's educational system produced a disaffected (and hence potentially revolutionary) intelligentsia. Comparison with other countries possessing a national classical curriculum is hence unnecessary.

Kale also chides José Miguel Nanni Soares for claiming "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" (p. 6). The objection, however, does not hold, since when Maistre traced the Revolution back to Jansenism, he was thinking not about expiation, but rather about Jansenism's contributions to revolutionary political thought – a thesis convergent with Van Kley's. At no point does Soares attribute to Van Kley a providentialism in any way similar to Maistre's: in fact his text states the precise opposite.

This is not the only instance in which Kale attributes to Soares a meaning opposite to that of his article. The *Considerations* is an essay in modern social science ***not because*** it subsumed the revolutionary phenomenon to a metaphysical plan, but rather, ***in spite of*** that fact. Kale also suggests that Soares tries and fails to prove the importance of the *Considerations* to French thought and society – even though Soares’ purpose is strictly and only to judge the place that the *Considerations* occupies in the historiography of the French Revolution.

Further inaccuracies and a lack of logic inhere in Kale’s criticism of the volume’s overall argument. He states: “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 [sic], Baader, Uvarov)” (p. 7). This statement is problematic on several levels. Comte, for one, did not try to “drain Maistre’s thought of its religious content.” He included Maistre’s most religious work, *Du pape* (1819) in the Positivist Canon, and used it as inspiration to found a religion that has been repeatedly described as a secularized version of Catholicism. Nor did Benjamin, as far as I know, “[try] to drain Maistre’s thought of its religious content” – in fact Kageura shows that the detective way of thinking that interested him was at bottom a theological way of thinking, an argument that is well established among literary critics. As for Schlegel the Catholic conservative, Robert Triomphe once characterized the entirety of his thought as “nothing but a German answer to Maistrian philosophy” (Triomphe 1969, 546-9) – the answer being very positive, and its author becoming a major propagator of Maistrian thought – so one wonders what Kale means by including him among those who disagreed with Maistre. The more important point, though, is that whether the thinkers discussed agreed with Maistre or not is immaterial to determining whether they used his thought or not as Kale’s sentence suggests: one does not have to agree with an author in order to make use of his thought.

Kale chides us for not proving that Maistre’s thought was “immensely important,” or that “interest in [him] was either bountiful or consistent” (p. 7), and he is right that we do not do so. But the reason we do not do so is that ***we are not interested in doing so***: the aim of our collection, as stated in the introduction, is to illustrate the variety of brushes with which Europeans have painted Maistre across the centuries. Consistency, we strive to argue, is the one thing that one should not look out for when surveying Maistre’s posterity (bounty is another matter, but again foreign to our purposes). Kale imputes to us aims that we lack, and then criticizes us for not meeting them.

A similar maneuver follows in the paragraphs criticizing Adrian Daub, Ryohei Kageura, Michael Kohlhauser and Marco Ravera for not presenting direct and written evidence of Maistre’s influence. Kale states that “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” (p. 7). Again, an element foreign to our text has been introduced – this time the Cambridge School, which is not

once mentioned in the entire collection – in order to claim that the collection does not meet its own standards. In fact, the collection does not purport to adopt a particular method. But Armenteros does discuss method in her essay, and we feel that it is important to highlight this, especially given that Kale places so much store by explicit, written evidence, and that it is her methodological preferences he addresses. Armenteros writes: “Uvarov’s epistemology is... suggested by his own actions as an educational administrator, which acquire intellectual meaning when read as texts whose meaning is ‘reinscribed,’ that is, fixed, in the same way that the meaning of words is fixed once they are written down. Actions leave traces, make a mark, and contribute to the emergence of patterns that become *documents*. This paper reads Uvarov’s policies and educational system as intellectual texts in their own right, and as intellectual contexts of his exchanges with Maistre” (p. 214).

The reference in this passage is to Paul Ricoeur’s essay “Meaningful Action Considered as Text,” not to the Cambridge School. And the reason for it is that it is directly germane to the paper’s purposes: to our knowledge, Ricoeur alone has devoted extensive attention to how to reconstruct meaning in the absence of written texts (as is the case here, where Uvarov’s half of the correspondence has been lost).

Unfortunately, having introduced ideas and claims that are not made by the text, Kale goes on to introduce also phrases that are not in it. He writes that according to Armenteros, Maistre “does not belong to the right forever” and cites p. 268 as the source of this citation. We regret to say that we have scoured p. 268 as well as the entirety of the collection looking for this phrase without being able to find it. But we do see what Kale is trying to say: that in pointing to Maistre’s scant right-wing posterity and revolutionary variety of conservatism, we are contradicting ourselves in speaking of him as a conservative at all. Again, this is a *non sequitur*: the fact that Maistre stirred more interest among the left than the right (especially in the nineteenth century) does not mean that he was not right-wing, nor does his eccentricity as a conservative mean that he was not a conservative.

Even more unfortunately, the next paragraph speculates about the deep, unstated motivations that animate our volume in ways that put us forward as crypto-theocrats. Kale writes: “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” (p. 7).

This is a completely unsubstantiated claim for which there is simply no evidence. In fact, we write explicitly that we wish to draw no political conclusions from the collection: “A work of intellectual history, this volume does not pretend to offer any straight answers to... questions about Europe’s future.” We wish simply to stimulate thought on the historical background of present political problems: “studying Maistre’s posterity can sharpen our awareness of how these questions arose, show some of the answers that were supplied to them in the past, and help to find ways of addressing them now” (p. 15). Whether the results are right-wing, left-wing, or

center is entirely the readers' business and not something we have the ambition of controlling.

In the discussion on p. 8, Kale yet again reproaches the editors for not meeting aims they lack. He writes that "there are problems with the critique of Berlin's essay that make it hard to put his thesis entirely to rest." Again, this presupposes a goal that the collection does not have: it is by no means its purpose to deny Berlin's thesis completely. In fact in the Introduction (p. 4), we mention Maistre's extreme right-wing readers – Carl Schmitt, Donoso Cortés and Charles Maurras – thus accepting the Berlinian observation of a connection between Maistre and fascism, while in the Conclusion Armenteros states: "Berlin was right... to discern Maistre's ultra-modernity. The herald of conservatism wanted to defend tradition with revolutionary means that are rarely commented upon, but that Berlin had the insight to detect immediately. His mistake was to assume that the posterity of political theories is politically stable, to believe that, because Maistre represented the right of his own time, he somehow belonged essentially, and only, to the right of Berlin's own" (p. 268).

The point of the collection is not to "demolish Maistre's reputation as an authoritarian reactionary" (p. 8) as Kale claims, but rather to suggest that his variety of conservatism is more complex than has heretofore been perceived, and to show that his legacy is not limited to the fascist figures Isaiah Berlin suggested. Kale likewise criticizes the editors for not including "some of [Maistre's] 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" (p. 8), but as stated in the Introduction, "the enterprise is, necessarily, far from exhaustive: Maistre has been so abundantly read and commented on by now that any effort to discuss his reception systematically could consume a lifetime" (p. 3). The collection's goals are necessarily illustrative rather than encyclopedic, and geared toward suggesting the diversity of Maistre's posterity rather than focusing on a single aspect of it.

Kale then raises a question of great interest for our subject. "It seems important to ask," he writes, "whether Maistre still deserves the stature of founder of French counter-revolutionary conservatism if he has been largely ignored [by the right]?" (p. 9) Unfortunately, the question evinces yet again Kale's tendency to deduce a writer's political position retrospectively from his political posterity. If Maistre was scantily read on the right, especially after 1870, when his Catholic and monarchist sympathies had less appeal for conservatives, it does not follow that he was not among the very first to formulate the Francophone conservative position, that he did not do so famously, and that he was not recognized as having done so by people across the political spectrum, both in his lifetime and afterward. Idiosyncrasy does not preclude foundation.

In the concluding paragraph (p. 9), Kale returns to his habit of equating scholars' opinions with those of the writers they discuss, and he does so to the astonishing degree of affirming that in the book's conclusion Armenteros "gives a consistently Maistrian reading" of the papers in the volume. The reasons given to prove this are that "she is satisfied with [Cyprian] Blamires' demonstration that Maistre was alien to fascism" – but how can this be a Maistrian opinion? Maistre never even heard of fascism – and that she "insists that [Tonatiuh Useche] Sandoval convincingly shows that the papacy's Christian spiritual authority played a central role in making Europe stable, free, and unique" – even though neither Sandoval nor Armenteros claim this. What would have been accurate to say is that Sandoval discusses the role that these ideas played

in Maistre's and Comte's thought. Further attempts to prove Armenteros' "Maistrarian reading" are that "[Kevin] 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." Again, Armenteros is not voicing these opinions but only paraphrasing the ideas of the nineteenth-century readers of Maistre studied by Erwin and Cahen.

Lastly, in note 9, p. 11, Kale makes a comment about the transmission of Maistre's ideas that hardly needs an argument on our part, since he directly provides the evidence to disprove his own claim. He writes: "in her recent book on Maistre, Armenteros... [cautioned] 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." As we hope this quote demonstrates, Armenteros does not claim that "we ought not to be too fussy" about "the precise mode of transmission," but that given the lacunae in the evidence, the best that can be done is to apply the method she proposes – one that, in uncertain cases, assumes convergence rather than influence.

Here ends the sum of most of the inaccuracies that we have found in Kale's review of our work. We thought it important to correct them, both for the sake of clarifying our approach to Maistre's posterity, and of assuring H-France's readers that we are not a group of crypto-theocrats secretly bent on resolving Europe's present ills by reinstating Christian law. We must end, however, by thanking Professor Kale very much once more for devoting such detailed attention and extensive reflection to our work.

Carolina Armenteros and Richard A. Lebrun

Richard Lebrun
 Professor Emeritus
 University of Manitoba
drrichardlebrun@gmail.com