

Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Ronald Schechter's review of David Andress, ed., *Experiencing the French Revolution* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013).

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The original review may be found on the H-France Review web site at:
<http://www.h-france.net/vol14reviews/vol14no72schechter.pdf>

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My thanks to Ron Schechter for his generous review of my colleagues' contributions to the volume we worked on together. Inevitably, I must protest a little (and it is only a little; we are, I feel, largely talking *entre amis* here) at his condensation of some of my introductory points - Daniel Wickberg, for example, wants to use the word "sensibility", which already has perfectly sound historical referents, as a catch-all term to embrace the totality of affectively-modulated human experience, which I think is going a little far for no great gain. I also take some care to show that Lynn Hunt has taken hold of only one strand of a complex and very much unresolved scientific debate about the neurological bases of experience. *Und so weiter...*

As for paradigmatic urges and their ethicality or otherwise, one text I single out for criticism is a very emphatic and condemnatory piece, verging on the denunciatory, which reflects, I think, the outer edge of academic debate where these kinds of things become, potentially at least, rather dangerous for the health of intellectual endeavour. For more juicy details, buy the book!

That is an extreme example, however, and not directly part of the debates on the Revolution I was discussing more generally. Some of that debate occurred on this very forum, and it was the palpable (if more gently expressed) sense that some participants did feel it was urgently necessary to formulate a guiding principle for understanding the French Revolution, around which some kind of consensus could be framed, that has stayed with me.

As I remarked at the time, there seems to me to be a very great difference between arguing for the persuasive value of one's own interpretations, whatever they may happen to be, and arguing that coming to agreement on what should stand as a "paradigm" is a good thing in itself. I do think that the latter is a rather odd thing to want to do, especially as it is something that historians have self-evidently never been good at sticking to. I don't think I have ever argued that such a view makes those holding it bad people, or bad historians - not least because some of them are definitely fine historians, and friends.

The debate will doubtless continue, (and of course, yielding to my well-known and deplorable reputation for ironisation, I might add that the longer it does, the more right it will make me... By the same token, if everyone agrees with me, I lose...!)

In the hope of much fruitful disagreement in future,
Regards,

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