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Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. xx + 468 pp. Notes, bibliography and index. \$34.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-7735-3199-4.

Response Essay by Julian Bourg, Bucknell University.

It is hard to say precisely when the loose constellation of figures and themes known as French theory dawned on the Anglophone world or if it has ever fully faded. For American scholars, the October 1966 Johns Hopkins conference on "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," and, more specifically for historians, a 1973 article by Hayden White on Michel Foucault, were crucial emblematic beginnings.[1] At present, long after the flares of poststructuralism and postmodernism have gone dark for many scholars, I have yet to attend an English-language academic conference where some luminary of postwar French thought is not at some point invoked as an authority. Disparate theorists continue to be jumbled together in puzzling ways. The list of likely suspects requires no cataloguing. They formed a "motley crew" who in "broad brushstrokes [share] a number of family resemblances: a concern about the opacity of language, suspicions about the unified self, doubts about historical progress, valorization of desire, and anxieties about power" (p. 11). This obviously non-exclusive list of themes ought to be familiar to anyone who received a liberal arts education or pursued graduate work in the humanities in the United States and perhaps Canada and the United Kingdom during the 1980s and 1990s.

My own encounter with French theory is germane to understanding the genesis and intentions of my book because, however idiosyncratic my own particular approach in it, I share with others the experience of having been influenced and marked by a distinctive intellectual moment. Rosemary Wakeman and Michael Scott Christofferson are right to note this generational axis. Here, the argument of *From Revolution to Ethics* reflects a specific historical conjuncture. In the late 1980s and early 1990s French theory appealed to myself and others around me because it offered a way to think critically in a moment of foreclosed political possibility, caught in the extended Reagan-Bush era and haunted by the constantly evoked and increasingly idealized 1960s whose shadow extended over an entire event-less generation that had been "born late." French thought gave some of us a language with which to chisel minor fissures in our own *société bloquée*. Althusserian "theoretical practice" had a considerable afterlife among a cohort who experienced no other compelling forms of engagement. Our intellectual lives were tremendously abstract and rarefied as French thinkers were read and combined in wildly creative ways. François Cusset has recently argued that French theory itself was quintessentially American.[2] The endless deconstruction of the self, for example, was sometimes a narcissistic exercise in self-fashioning.[3] To some extent, French theory enabled us to see ourselves from the outside, for France seemed as far away in space as 1960s radicalism was in time.

Drawn into the gravity of the brightly shining stars of French theory, I was also ill at ease with the trendy double-speak, hyper-self-reflexive worry, and cynicism in the circles I came to refer to as the "semiotic mafia." As a child of the Civil Rights and Catholic Worker movements,

structuralist and poststructuralist thought was unable to scratch my social justice itch. I thus latched onto the question of ethics as an end-point to theoretical negativism.[4] The “ethical lacunae of French theory” was well noted in the United States at the time, and numerous publications in the 1990s addressed its “ethical implications, applications, dilemmas, and dead-ends” (p. 11). Studies in intellectual history, however, led to me to ask about the belated working through of this issue. Why was ethics emerging in the 1990s as a paramount theme in a variety of disciplines? What were the historical origins and trajectory of this discourse? And furthermore, why had French theory generated so much commentary, proved so methodologically fruitful, and been so annoyingly durable while remaining in some sense poorly understood? How was it that so few of the endless books published about French theorists explained the historical context in which they, in all their incestuous and disharmonious diversity, thrived? The extremely de-historicized reception of French theory in America remains obviously striking. *From Revolution to Ethics* was animated by the convergence of the questions I have outlined; in other words, What sense did the ethical thematic have among French theorists in their own originary context? To some extent, I meet Cusset in mid-Atlantic flight: a Frenchman investigating the production of French theory in America, and an American exploring the historical conditions in France that generated certain thinkers and ideas that no longer belong exclusively to the French.

Reading the four reviews of my book by Michael Scott Christofferson, Jonathan Judaken, Xavier Vigna, and Rosemary Wakeman in this H-France Forum has been a gratifying experience, for what they notice and add as well as where they prod and push. I am especially grateful for their points of disagreement, a higher form of praise than approval since it opens up avenues of further dialogue. For some of us, the conversation has been ongoing for a number of years. At times, reading these reviews, I wondered if they were all about the same book, even though I am its author, so different were their emphases and concerns. I was reminded of an image I use to describe the many interpretations of 1968 itself: “Now as then, May [’68] can amount to a historical Rorschach test, upon which one projects a range of perspectives, emotions, and judgments” (p. 27). Certainly, one of the pleasures of publishing a book is to watch others read it creatively, and sometimes myopically, through their own lenses.

From Revolution to Ethics begins with the simple fact that, whereas revolution was a common watchword in 1968, by the early 1980s, ethics had become a new one. Remarkably, some of the most vocal advocates of revolution during *les années 68* were the very ones who later adopted the vocabulary of ethics. My concern is with the consequences rather than the experience of 1968 itself, let alone its origins. I clearly state that ethical fascination is obviously not the only consequence of 1968 and, vice versa, that 1968 is not the only source of the undeniable contemporary preeminence of ethics as a Western public discourse. But the ethical turn happened. To explain how and why it did, I examine a number of exemplary moments and dynamics of the 1970s. As the reviewers observe, the narrative is constructed around a number of non-exhaustive episodes (I might very well have highlighted others) that epitomized the emergence of the ethical thematic: student Maoists courting violence but giving birth to direct democratic militancy around prisons; the origins and problematics of a signature text of the anti-psychiatry movement, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*; conflicts between men and women over the meanings of sexual liberation and the limits of desire; and the media phenomenon of the New Philosophers who popularized moral and ethical stances.

The narrative’s spotlight shines on the above scenes and on a continuum of themes that runs from the micro to the macro: subjectivity, intersubjectivity, institutions and associations, the state, and humanity in general. I also claim that the narrative recounts real historical changes

that resulted from dynamics of immanent tension and conflict. Such dynamics are explained according to the structuring motifs of *ethos* and *laos*. The turn to ethics transpired as the immanent ethos of 1968 encountered transcending laws and limits on the levels just mentioned: selves, others, institutions, the state, and humanity. Agitation by activists committed to the ethos of revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to conflict with the French state, Republican law, and thus the judicial system, bringing new attention to prisons. The subsequent ethical critique of the prison had certain parallels with another contemporaneous form of institutional critique: anti-psychiatry. The latter shifted attention from institutions themselves to questions of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and the question of desire. The antinomian ethos of 1968 reached its fullest expression with the philosophy of desire of the early 1970s. The prominence of this theme reflected the depth and seriousness of the *remaniement* underway, but it also re-raised the issue of limits. Feminist critiques of limitless desire in the mid-1970s paradoxically returned some radicals to the state as a resource for instantiating liberation, in this case, over the question of sexual violence. Overriding suspicion of the state, however, again found expression in the New Philosophers, who pushed the ethical turn around its final corner. Their rejection of politics tout court in favor of ethical and moral postures dressed in universalistic and metaphysical garb signified the completion of the decade-long shift from revolution to ethics. In all these spotlighted scenes and micro-to-macro themes, various senses of the ethical can be found emerging, gathering, and becoming explicit cumulatively over time.

A final chapter presents the explosion of interest in the theme of ethics after the ethical turn had transpired by the late 1970s, notably in the thought of Michel Foucault and Jean-Paul Sartre. The former, along with other notables of French theory, especially Deleuze and Guattari, are treated intermittently throughout the book. Though I hope a useful contribution, *From Revolution to Ethics* is not the full-scale historicization of structuralism and poststructuralism that still needs to be written. Though it was not my explicit intention, Judaken is probably right, however, that “one way to understand [the] book is to read it as a multi-layered contextualist rendering of Foucault” in particular. The study concludes with a critique of prototypical “left” and “right” interpretations of the 1960s as well as a meditation on the uniquely French versions of associations and institutions. Since the lion’s share of my work is dedicated to demonstrating *that* a turn to ethics occurred and showing, step by step, probably in too much detail, *how* it transpired, only at the end do I turn explicitly to the issue of evaluating the meaning of the ethical turn from a normative point of view.

Christofferson, Judaken, and Wakeman all do a fine job of grasping and succinctly recapitulating aspects of the main argument. Wakeman notes “the diverse threads” I attempt to weave together, the various sites explored, and the ironically unintended invigoration of “French civil life.” Her judgment that this is a revisionist work whose “optimistic” argument breaks with Michael Seidman and Kristin Ross is echoed by Judaken, who notes my attempt to move “beyond the impasses” of both Ross and the Raymond Aron to Luc Ferry and Alain Renault interpretive line that celebrates the unintended liberal and stabilizing outcome of the seemingly transgressive revolt. I was surprised that a more explicit rendering of my views on the considerable literature on May was missing from all four assessments. I contrast Ross’s well-known depiction of May’s “afterlives” as a genuine revolution betrayed by its protagonists with Tony Judt’s dismissal of 1968 as a non-event that merely delayed France’s inevitable embrace of liberalism. Both interpretations ascribed to the view that 1968 was a failed revolution and thus come curiously close to mirroring one another. In contrast, I maintain that the energies unleashed in 1968 were productive and consequential, though in ways not self-evident to protagonists at the time. I likewise examine French interpretations of the events from 1968–98 (the moment when research began), fitting them into a schematic of “left” and “right” that, while certainly reductive, enables me to make the case that interpretations of the 1960s in France as well as in the United States have been remarkably frozen. I have no doubt that the

recent flood of publications during the events' fortieth anniversary would substantially alter my treatment of the literature, but the book itself is part of that very torrent.[5] *Soit*. What might have been a very reasonable question from Vigna on my use of French historiography is, at one at the same time, curious (I spend considerable time sorting through thirty years' worth), fair (I might indeed have integrated the work of Bernard Brilliant, Boris Gobille, and François Dosse into my analysis), and haughty (global debates on French intellectual life are irreducible to a French historiography on intellectuals that is, to be frank, often gossipy and methodologically uninspired; Vigna never explains how Brilliant, Gobille, and Dosse would alter or qualify my argument).

Judaken and Vigna discern the goal of historicizing French theory, the former more comfortable with the heuristic limitation of the field of inquiry than the latter, for whom selection leads to detrimental partiality. Judaken furthermore grasps my attempt to read "theory as a gauge of the ethos of a cultural moment." This is an important point because my contextualist approach does attempt to situate ideas, thinkers, and intellectuals as social actors within a wider historical ambience and explain each through the other. There is reciprocal conditioning of ideas and history—of ethics and ethos. While zeroing in on precise episodes from an unwriteable total history, I look to complex forms of dynamic interaction that involve the gathering, accumulation, condensation, combustion, and dispersal of forces, whether they be texts, individual characters, debates, social movements, the judicial system, desire, party politics, deeper historical inheritances, or what have you. The approach has virtues and deficiencies; it is not necessarily satisfying or successful. However, the mutual refraction of ethics and ethos calls to mind the now largely forgotten methods of an earlier approach to intellectual history. "[T]he social historian of ideas," Peter Gay wrote forty years ago, "must use all the instruments he needs for his particular task, and what instruments he needs will emerge at least in part in the course of his investigations. ... [T]he precise choice of intellectual tools must depend on the character of the idea under investigation, for each idea is different from every other idea." [6] More than any other reviewer under discussion here, Christofferson offers a conceptually precise depiction of my main argument about the 1970s and the dynamics of historical change: in the name of liberation, the antinomian ethos of 1968 undermined many limits and laws, including *marxisant* laws of history, but in facing the question of its own limits, this ethos instigated a turn to ethics that expressed a transvaluation, and thus a kind of success or vindication, of the liberational spirit of 1968. Protagonists of the era sought to "change life." Not always as intended and seldom in the original terms employed, life has nonetheless changed in ways that have realized aspects of the spirit of May 1968. Among the many signs today of its success is the worldwide predominance of the ethical paradigm.

The reviewers under discussion ask such a variety of questions and raise such a range of objections that the most economical approach is to consider them individually and take note of where they overlap. Such is the case with the issue of questioning 1968 as a starting point for my study. Wakeman is right to introduce the issue of postwar humanism as a source for ethical articulation in the 1970s. I do evoke social Catholicism as an influence on the Groupe d'information sur les prisons and see the ghost of Albert Camus in some of the New Philosophers. However, the triumph of structuralism was so effective that the theme of ethics had virtually disappeared from the radar screen of many French thinkers during the 1960s. Writ large, one could imagine at least one storyline of postwar French intellectual history involving a parabolic curve that runs from the humanism of the existentialist moment out to structuralist anti-humanism and back to the Republican humanism of the 1980s and 1990s. Subjectivity and ethics, for instance, would thus appear as fairly persistent concerns and structuralism as an exception. Matters, though, are obviously more complex.

As to Wakeman's point about intellectuals in the media age, I must give way to others who have treated the question more thoroughly, especially Tamara Chaplin.[7] It is true that the 1970s were a distinctive time when *affaires* like those I examine—the polemics around rape and then New Philosophy—combined print and television in electrifying ways. Print was still dominant, and television was still new.

Judaken, too, pushes me on the pre-1968 question, using Sartre, a figure close to his heart, as evidence that “a fundamental shift” did not take place in the 1970s. He provides numerous examples of the fascination the theme of ethics held for Sartre throughout the entire postwar period. I am happy to defer to his deeper knowledge of Sartre, and this is the first of a number of simply honest disagreements with my interlocutors. Judaken does not mention the fact that I carefully, though briefly, reconstruct the ways ethics figured in Sartre's intellectual biography since the late 1920s (pp. 315–21). The promissory note at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, the flimsy arguments of “Existentialism is a Humanism,” the Rome lecture, and so forth—these do attest to his attempt to formulate coherent ethical standpoints. It was exceedingly difficult to yield an ethics from an ontology. We need only consider the very fact that Sartre wrote so much and published so little. For such a systematically inclined thinker, it matters that he was so unsatisfied with the fruits of his labor. Certainly in Sartre's case, page length was no proof of coherence. It also matters that, however controversial the interviews with Benny Lévy, we are left with Sartre's own 1980 interpretation of his relationship to the theme: “By ‘ethics’ I mean that every consciousness, no matter whose, has a dimension *that I didn't study in my philosophical works* and that few people have studied, for that matter: the dimension of obligation” (emphasis added, p. 5). I would have liked to have read more about Judaken's views on Thomas Anderson, on whose book I plainly rely.[8] I will return in the conclusion to Wakeman's observation about the international dimensions of 1968 and to Judaken's discussion of form.

Christofferson makes a number of forceful criticisms. Like Wakeman and Judaken, he is hungry for some reference to the pre-1968 scene. He then goes on to say that I misread Marxism, omit workers, and “[minimize] the specifically political dimension of the 1970s decline of revolutionary politics.” Christofferson and I simply disagree about the story of the 1970s worth emphasizing. In his book and in this response, Christofferson operates with a constrained notion of “politics” focused on elections, parties, and the state, that it was the point of the era to undermine, and fails to note that the main significance of the moment was the vast broadening of political terrain: prisons, asylums, gender, violence, theoretical content, and so forth. He maintains that revolutionary politics declined out of fears of Gulags in France; I insist that politics, especially politics oriented toward the state, was always going to be unable to fulfill the diverse liberational anticipations of the '68 years.[9] I am trying to fit him under my umbrella, and he is trying to fit me under his. It is for others to decide if our accounts are compatible. What is regrettable is that after having done a fine job in the beginning of his review of climbing inside the self-understanding of my arguments, instead of going on to discuss and evaluate them on their own terms, he offers a number of extrinsic criticisms while rehearsing the arguments of his own book.

I do “[fail] to address the question of whether the shift from revolution to ethics of the 1970s does not have pre-May origins,” because I do not ask it. It is not unreasonable to ask about the pre-1968 scene, whether it concern postwar humanism, Sartre's career, or the history of French Marxism. It may be true that “Marxist revisionism ... might also be seen as preparing the ground for [the] ethical turn.” There is now much good work that de-thrones 1968 as an *annus mirabilis*, relativizing its iconic status and placing it on the shelf of longer chronologies. Fair enough. But the effort to minimize 1968 by sinking it into a *moyenne durée*, the postwar or “the Sixties,” misses its uniqueness and eventfulness. I will underscore what I have already written:

[T]here is no escaping the fact that the events of 1968 were a watershed; they were understood at the time and since to have been unexpected and spectacular. In France, May 1968 was singular, emblematic, and prototypical all at once, opening a period of magnified political activism that dwarfed pre-1968 stirrings. Revisionism cannot change the fact that the events amounted to the largest general strike in twentieth-century Europe and opened a historical period. A pivotal moment in an invariably more complicated history, May 1968 is our point of departure for an adventure of ideas, intellectuals, culture, politics, and public life in France from the late 1960s to the early 1980s (p. 23).

The issue of chronology is raised by Christofferson to access a true objection: that I misread the history of postwar Marxism. I do not think that he could disagree that Marxism played a role in French life, say, from the Liberation until the mid-1970s that it has not since that time. His research, like mine, is dedicated precisely to illustrating how this well-known reality came about. I will admit to some loose formulations and imprecise generalizations in my characterization of the entrenched status of Marxism in *les années 68*. However, Christofferson's vaunted Marxist revisionism is surprisingly vague. Does he mean *Socialisme ou barbarie*? Maximilien Rubel? Roger Garaudy? Louis Althusser? The Soviet Union according to Mao? In any case, the notion of Marxism in "serious crisis" is not entirely borne out by the facts. This was not the case prior to 1968, as demonstrated by the 1960s history of the Union des étudiants communistes and Trotskyist, Maoist, and "Italian" factions.[10] This was not the case during 1968, as any random page of Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's massive edited collection of student tracts would show.[11] Appeals to class struggle and solidarity, the attack on the bourgeois university, the rejection of reform, and direct action against the state were very much present. And the alleged crisis of Marxism was not at all the case in the *les années 68* when, more than a half-hearted "revival of Leninism," far-leftists were among the prime movers of social and political change. Christofferson's own work underestimates the significance of *gauchisme*. Some leftist *revendications* generated agendas, questions, possibilities of social action, and conceptual and practical dilemmas for which Marxism proved inadequate. Marxism, in other words, helped generate from within the means for its self-overcoming. My case study of Maoism and prison agitation illustrates this dynamic, but so does Vive la Révolution's slogan *changer la vie*, which was pilfered by the Common Program. What is oddest about Christofferson's insistence on the pre-1968 defanging of Marxism is that his own book ultimately makes the opposite claim, with which I whole-heartedly concur: the watershed transpired in the 1970s. Moreover, he and I are perfectly in agreement that the interplay between direct democratic elements and Marxism led to the implosion of the latter.

Christofferson and Vigna complain that there are not any workers in my book. Such a protest makes more sense coming from Vigna, whose bona fides on the topic are well established.[12] I actually appreciate the fact that two reviewers feel so strongly about the absence of workers. We need more social history. It is a good point, but one that has absolutely nothing to do with what my book argues. The charge is strange coming from Christofferson whose own scholarship also centers on intellectuals and not workers. Neither he nor Vigna gives Deleuze his due in their work. There is not much point to comments such as this, so I will not chastise the reviewers for airing their laundry lists of what the book does not discuss. However, the burden is on the critic to show how what is missing qualifies, transforms, or undermines what is there. One would have to demonstrate that ethics were in fact an influential cultural discourse and paradigm in the 1960s and early 1970s. Or one would have to show that the absence of workers undercuts a critical pillar of the argument for an ethical turn. The fact that workers were essential to May 1968 and its aftermath is too obvious to mention. My argument, though, is that on the margins of the drama of working-class politics a crucial development took place involving the transfer of *marxisant* ideas and practices onto ersatz sites of contestation. The

entire understanding of the New Social Movements depends on the dynamics of displacement and substitution. To this extent, workers are not part of the story I want to recount. Vigna is obviously right that the Gauche prolétarienne was primarily interested in factories, but awarding a runner-up “place secondaire” to prison struggles fails to understand that the forms of insubordination developed through those struggles would have far-reaching consequences. Christofferson’s description of a kind of Sorelian voluntarism in the air is useful, but his summary judgment on “the failure of exemplary action and ultimately working-class radicalism” conceals a more complicated history and weakens his claim that I miss a crucial element, for if radicalism failed so easily, how could it be decisive? Christofferson’s dismissal of workerism is probably unlikely to please Vigna either. I attempt to show that the so-called failure of certain forms of engagement was often surprisingly, unintentionally productive, “successful,” and perhaps even progressive. *Failure* as an explanatory mechanism has real limits. Of my avoidance of defeat, Christofferson concludes: “Bourg’s focus on the *désirants* obscures this important and rather different history [of failure] that is at the heart of the post-May period and leaves the reader with a partial understanding of the turn from revolution.” I am happy to acknowledge that my account, like all others, is partial. Its originality, I believe, is that it attempts to step into the conductive force field created by the two opposing poles Jean-Pierre Le Goff sees at the heart of *l’après-mai*: Marxism-Leninism and *les désirants*. [13]

In the end, Christofferson and I fundamentally differ on “the specifically political dimension of the 1970s decline of revolutionary politics.” More precisely, my position is that his interpretation is very persuasive but misses the forest for the trees. In the second half of his review he throws some powerful punches, some of which I am willing to take on the chin. His best arguments have to do with “the tension between ethics and some forms of anti-totalitarian thought and practice.” It is, of course, inaccurate to see full overlap between the two discourses. Paul Thibaud’s questioning of *Esprit*’s earlier compromising moralism is thought-provoking, though “discomfort” with the ethical turn by architects of the revival of political philosophy is less surprising. My point is that whether one endorsed or criticized ethics as a lens for grappling with experience, the theme was pervasive by the late 1970s. So too, Christofferson’s fine point about the anti-communist political posturing of the Comité des intellectuels pour l’Europe des libertés (CIEL) underscores the incompatibility of certain aspects of anti-totalitarian discourse with the privilege of ethics. But the fact that the CIEL judged communists in the government as “moralement inacceptable” seems to prove instead of weaken my point. Furthermore, a closer examination of the basis on which the CIEL engaged with politics, in other words, the criteria according to which it fought “the danger of totalitarianism it saw in France,” would perhaps reveal connections between our interpretations. Christofferson seldom explores anti-totalitarian ideas, often reducing them to the common denominator of counter-revolutionary negation without appreciating their great diversity, fecundity, usefulness, and longevity. Politics unified by what they are *against* are rather thin. Still, his basic observation is reasonable: anti-totalitarians like Thibaud or the CIEL did not put everything in *le même bocal* and reserved special derision for communists. Such objections expand the discussion.

Christofferson’s final point on French electoral politics and the New Philosophers is the most vehement and, to me, ultimately the least convincing because he largely restates an argument I directly addressed in *From Revolution to Ethics*. I agree that my discussion of New Philosophy would have benefited from “a diachronic perspective” and should have contended with the earlier writings of the likes of Christian Jambet, Guy Lardreau, and André Glucksmann. I do, however, discuss the theme of the failure of revolution with respect to Jambet, Lardreau, and Maurice Clavel, a linchpin and unifying figure whose significance Christofferson does not mention. In the end, though a crucial part of the equation, electoral politics and anti-totalitarianism are too narrow an optics to apprehend the broader changes of the era. No politics could have fulfilled the antinomian and direct democratic aspirations of some of the partisans

and inheritors of 1968. The following extended citation encapsulates my irreconcilable difference with Christofferson:

So, while it is true that the New Philosophers emerged at the same time that the Union of the Left was collapsing, on the eve of the much-anticipated Legislative elections of 1978, their target was loftier and bolder. On the whole, they equated power and politics with barbarism. To be sure, the New Philosophers were fundamentally critical of Marxism, but they were so in a particular way. The critique of power per se preceded the application of that critique to Marxism. To interpret anti-Marxism as the driving force rather than the particular target of their attacks is thus to confuse motives and expressions. ... Alain Peyrefitte, Minister of Justice, correctly identified the dual motives of the New Philosophers when he said that they claimed that “one must defy power, which is by nature bad” and also that “the worst of powers is that which weighs on minds before weighing on bodies – today a role played by Marxism.” The New Philosophers’ flight into philosophical abstractions and the dream-state of metaphysics, culminating in their valorization of rebellion, dissidence, and ethics, was seen not incorrectly as a rejection of the electoral politics of the Left. But it was more. New Philosophy rejected politics as such (p. 252).

I learned a number of things from Vigna’s three criticisms. He claims that *From Revolution to Ethics* presents a “caricature de 68,” a “deformation” of the movements analyzed, and the invention of a “pensée 68’ ... partielle et surtout décontextualisée.” Vigna is part of a new generation of French historians struggling against the burdensome traditions of the 1968 generation that weigh on France today. The deluge of publications on ’68 on the events’ fortieth anniversary, far exceeding previous decadal commemorations, attests both to the difficulty of the uphill battle and to the broader generational shift of which he is part. While he is right to sniff out what I myself call “dried and fixed” interpretations of the era, he misses how sympathetic I am to the same project (p. 13). No amount of revision, however, can change the fact that *les années 68* had an anti-totalitarian dimension or promised liberation. The clichéd slogan “il est interdit d’interdire” actually captures and embodies crucial conceptual tensions and paradoxes that are key to understanding 1968 and its aftermath. A very effective form of revisionism, it seems to me, is to take over the dried and fixed, the accepted starting points, and rework them from the inside out. Rebelling against caricature misses how caricature itself is part of the field that needs to be analyzed. I have little invested in an Oedipal struggle with the “vulgate de 68.”

Vigna’s substantive criticisms of my treatments of Maoist mobilization over prisons and of debates between feminists and gay male activists are more interesting. I have already mentioned his shortsightedness in dismissing the prison activism of the Gauche prolétarienne (GP) as less historically significant than its workerism. As he fully knows, the GP engaged in an impressive array of “secteurs”: from Paris to the banlieue and province and on themes such as *lycées*, universities, the media, propaganda, farmers, immigrants, the military, women, cinema, health, abortion, international leftism, as well as prisons and certainly above all factories.[14] It is this very diversity that was significant and productive, for fragmentation bred elaboration and transformation. Additionally, I am unsure what the problem is with my reference (“un raccourci historique vertigineux”) to the traditions of popular justice, which in France do point back to the Revolution. Something is gained in noting that Maoist popular justice gestured to long-term structural dilemmas in France between the forces of direct democracy and popular sovereignty, on one hand, and representative democracy and Republican law, on the other hand. I simply do not understand Vigna’s comment about Sartre’s critique of Ewald at Bruay-en-Artois in 1972. Sartre had played the role of prosecutor at the popular tribunal at Fouquières-les-Lens in late 1970 and at the time consistently stressed the relevance of the theory of popular justice, notably in contrast to Foucault (pp. 72–73). I would like to know more about how Sartre’s views on

popular justice are supposed to have changed. Vigna's objection to Althusser's quip on the funeral of Pierre Overney, though itself trivial, does point to the major issue of when post-1968 *gauchisme* went into decline. On this occasion there is a great amount of room for nuance and disagreement. My narrative tends to locate this shift after 1972, but this is because my focus moves to other scenes and episodes. The important point for me is that *gauchisme* did decline and other languages and forms of engagement re-occupied the space it had held. Vigna is absolutely right that dealing with Trotskyism would have led me to tell a different story than the one I did. Finally, to his worry that I "subsume immédiatement" feminism and gay liberation under the heading of sexual revolution or sexual liberation, I can only point out that I already responded to this objection in the book: "I do not mean to suggest that phenomena of the *sexual revolution* and *gender* are one and the same. Rather, since in 1970s France they combined in fascinating and sometimes conflicting ways, it is of interest to examine their relationship in greater detail" (p. 182). The mention of the Russier and Carpentier affairs, through which the French public was confronted by the sexuality of minors in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was engaging. These affairs enhance my portrayal of "la recherche tâtonnante d'une libération sexuelle au coeur de la société française," which, as I show, indeed involved much more than ideas.

Vigna's third and "principale objection" concerns the intellectual field. He is unhappy with my selection of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari, in his view the result of a "purge ... sévère" and a "reconstruction ... extrêmement partielle" that excludes a full-scale engagement with structuralism or many other intellectuals. To some extent, this criticism foregrounds the intriguing *décalage* between French intellectual life within France and the peregrinations of French thought around the globe. I am entirely sympathetic to the fact that the program of French theory generated abroad does not compute in France. One can begin with the basic observation that the familiar distinction between structuralism and poststructuralism makes little sense within the hexagon. It is therefore not surprising that the basic warrant and aim of my project is lost on Vigna. French scholars are right to be puzzled by some characterizations of French history written from afar. But misconstruction cuts both ways. Althusser, for instance, courageously acknowledged that his own intellectual "conjuncture" had taken shape "in France, which, as always, remained ignorant of all that was happening beyond its borders." [15] In truth, my contribution to the historicization of French theory—the original motivation for the project discussed in the beginning of this response essay—is modest. I look forward with great anticipation to reading the emerging work of others. In *From Revolution to Ethics*, I do follow particular thinkers, episodes, and *tendances* in the intellectual and cultural life of 1970s France, and perforce others are left out. Be that as it may, readers will note the range of terrain covered. Vigna's contention that Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari—far from the only significant figures in the book—"sont apparus *ultérieurement* comme les figures marquantes" simply neglects the considerable evidence I provide for their paramount reflection of and contribution to the cultural politics of the 1970s. The refrain that I perversely marshal sources "pour les besoins de sa démonstration" seems to me bizarre, since all historical writing selects evidence and fashions arguments. Finally, the notion that *From Revolution to Ethics* provides a "décontextualisée" version of French thought will not make sense to a certain readership who can justly complain that I pay too much attention to context and not enough to ideas. In the end, I am not convinced that Vigna makes a compelling case; his largely extrinsic concerns fail to provide contrary evidence and counter-arguments that directly address my theses.

Where they engage *From Revolution to Ethics*, none of the reviews in this H-France Forum seem to disagree with my basic point: that an ethical turn took place in the 1970s. One could argue that the mole of revolution is simply buried underground in an age of reaction and that

revolutionary thought remains a useful category of historical analysis. One could also argue that there is nothing new under the sun and thus little significance to the recent renaissance of ethical modes of thought. Here, however, there seems general agreement that historically distinctive and meaningful developments took place in the post-1968 years that involved the decline of a revolutionary paradigm and the rise of others, including ethical fascination. It is obviously true that more robust explanations of the 1970s would need to reach back into the earlier postwar period and perhaps farther still; it is also undeniably true that the ethical turn alone cannot explain the complexity, depth, and breadth of “the Sixties”; and it is above all true that the history of French theory awaits fuller reconstruction. The thesis that an ethical turn did not take place, however, seems to me rather untenable.

And yet, as Wakeman appropriately wonders, “[Did] any of it really matter?” I think it did, and I invite new readers to explore for themselves the reasons why. For although the ethical turn did involve “left-wing melancholy,” it encompassed much more. The implications of ethical fascination, like the significance of French intellectual life, have been global. A very just criticism to make of *From Revolution to Ethics* is that it limits itself to France. Some of the best work on the Sixties in recent years has emphasized the self-evidently transnational, and not merely “pan-European,” dimensions of the era. In many quarters, it is increasingly difficult to approach 1968 with only one country in mind. It is worth reflecting on the fact that so many French publications on the fortieth anniversary of 1968 focused only on France. The field of French studies as a whole is implicated in the challenge to historicize the late twentieth century, precisely the moment when national histories irreversibly blur in original ways.

A final caveat concerns Judaken’s subtle reading of how the form and content of *From Revolution to Ethics* mirror one another. He generously grasps how “grand theoretical discussions were themselves adjudicated and addressed in their situational specifics.” In the end, though, my overall arguments on the engines of historical change fail to convince him. “The *petites histories*,” he concludes, “are more compelling than the grand narrative ... the fragmentation of Bourgeois structuring of the narrative ... parallels the fragmentation that emerged from the short-circuiting of May ’68’s revolutionary aspirations.”[16] I was wondering why I appreciated this criticism so much until I was reminded of Deleuze and Guattari’s responses to critiques of *Anti-Oedipus*, which I now understand better than I had before. Noting that they had already “moved on” to other projects, Deleuze observed that “a book is a little cog in much more complicated external machinery ... a flow meeting other flows.” The question worth asking, he said, is, “How does it work for you? If it doesn’t work, if nothing comes through, you try another work. This ... way of reading is intensive: something comes through or it doesn’t.”[17] If *From Revolution to Ethics* works for some readers, and if they find something useful in it, then I can claim satisfaction in the fact that contact has been made, connections established, and conversations set in motion.

NOTES

[1] I would like to express my deep gratitude to the editors of H-France, and especially to Vinni Datta, for their invitation to participate in this Forum, and to Michael Scott Christofferson, Jonathan Judaken, Xavier Vigna, and Rosemary Wakeman for their reviews. François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* [2003], trans. Jeff Fort, with Josephine Berganza and Marlon Jones (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 29–32. Hayden White, “Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground,” *History and Theory* 12, 1 (1973): 23–54.

[2] Cusset, *French Theory*.

[3] Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 603ff.

[4] These biographical details are briefly recounted in François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari: Biographie croisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 561.

[5] Those interested in the new topography will want to read Julian Jackson's review essay on nearly twenty books, including mine. Jackson, "Some Recent Writing on May 1968," *French Historical Studies*, forthcoming.

[6] Peter Gay, "The Social History of Ideas: Ernst Cassirer and After," in *The Critical Spirit: Essays in Honor of Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff and Barrington Moore, Jr. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 119–20.

[7] Tamara Chaplin, *Turning On the Mind: French Philosophers on Television* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[8] Thomas C. Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993).

[9] Julian Bourg, review of *Intellectuals Against the Left: The Anti-Totalitarian Moment of the 1970s in French Intellectual Politics*, by Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Politics, Culture & Society* 25:1 (Spring 2007).

[10] See Bourg, "The Red Guards of Paris: French Student Maoism of the 1960s," *History of European Ideas* 31, 4 (December 2005).

[11] Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, eds., *The French Student Uprising, November 1967–June 1968*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1971).

[12] Xavier Vigna, *L'insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68: Essai d'histoire politique des usines* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007).

[13] Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *Mai 68, l'héritage impossible*, foreword by François Gèze (Paris: La Découverte, 1998; rev. ed. 2002).

[14] Dossier, France, Gauche prolétarienne, F Δ Rés. 576. Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre.

[15] Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever* [1992], ed. Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang, trans. Richard Veasey (New York: The New Press, 1993), 176.

[16] The judgment is especially striking since it contrasts a criticism others have made: that the book is too "teleological." See reviews by Samuel Moyn in *The Sixties* 1:1 (June 2008): 93–96; Warren Breckman in *The Journal of Modern History* 81 (March 2009): 207–209; and Julian Jackson, "Some Recent Writing on May 1968."

[17] Gilles Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic" [1 April 1973], in *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 8–9.

Julian Bourg
Bucknell University
jeb061@bucknell.edu

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