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Critics of Revolution

i. The Hard Authority of Punishment and the Soft Authority of Custom: Maistre and Burke

Conservatism, like liberalism, has no Decalogue, no College for the Propagation of the Faith, no founding Declaration of Independence, and no doctrinal compendium to match the Marx-Engels Standard Edition. Into that gap, at the end of the nineteenth century, when conservatives were hunting for an intellectual tradition, the writings of Edmund Burke (1729–97) on the French Revolution were rediscovered as a rich and ever-giving second best. Burke's themes—the authority of tradition, the folly of political intellectuals who ignored tradition, and the organic but vulnerable character of society—were singled out as dialectical weaponry.

Burke's writings gave conservatism in retrospect, particularly conservatism in Britain and the United States, a tone of balance, openness to facts, and all-round moderation that stood out in contrast to the blind zeal of conservatism in France and Germany. The works of Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), a Savoyard lawyer and exile from the French Revolution, were commonly cited to illustrate the extreme, unbridled character of the continental right. Burke bequeathed to Anglo-American conservatism a tone of enlightened good sense and worldly-wise competence. Maistre became the Counter-Enlightenment forerunner of right-wing authoritarians and fascists. This contrast sees too much of the early twentieth century in the late eighteenth. It relies on selective editing and neglects telling elements that the thinkers shared. Maistre was never going to sit well in conservatism's front parlor but belongs in the household as much as Burke.

Maistre and Burke each had unusual rhetorical power and a rare gift of phrase. Maistre argued in black and white with Manichean ferocity. He drove contrasts to extremes and stretched good points past breaking. "Every government is despotic: the only choice is to obey or rebel." "The only institutions that last are religious." "Liberty was always the gift of kings." As if to seize back the guillotine from unworthy hands, he wrote of the scaffold's sacredness and the hangman's piety. Burke's writings, which often began as speeches, were less angry and more to the English taste. His targets—religious enthusiasm, political intellectualism, legal codification—were welcome to ears at ease in their world and suspicious of meddling questioners. Burke's irony was parliamentary and teasing; Maistre's, wounded and, like Jonathan Swift's, savage. Maistre was a lawyer. Burke studied law. Neither argued as philosophers, although Burke had so argued when younger in his attack on the thought that there were presocial people, and when establishing the *sublime* among the categories of aesthetics. On political topics, Burke's favorite argumentative pace was presto, and he could be vicious as well as lyrical. The Boston council was "vermin"; the commoners of 1789 were like "a gang of Maroon slaves suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage."

Both he and Maistre were social outsiders. Burke was a Dublin-born commoner of Anglo-Irish parentage. Maistre was a member of the provincial administrative nobility from Savoy, the French-speaking part of a northern Italian kingdom that had bounced back and forth between France, Spain, Austria, and fragile independence since the sixteenth century. As workaday officials or servants to political masters, both wrote of politics from the inside.

Both thinkers suffered a long decline and slow recovery in their reputations. William Gladstone read Burke through (as he did most things), and Burke had a following among bookish American Whigs, notably Rufus Choate (1799–1859), who ranked him with Homer, Cicero, and John Milton as required reading to "liberalize" the study of politics and law. Walter Bagehot, by contrast, ranked Burke as an early influence on conservatism lower than Pitt the Younger. T. E. Kebbel's *A History of Toryism* (1886), one of the tradition's first scholarly surveys, mentioned Burke only in passing.

In the liberal ascendancy of the 1830s, criticisms of the French Revolution of the kind Burke and Maistre had made were widely felt to have missed their historical mark. Blackening "constitutional" 1789 with the "popular-despotic" 1793–94 and treating the Revolution as a single criminal folly were unconvincing, given how widely the gains of 1789 were accepted and how even the Restoration had not reversed the French middle classes' economic gains. As for the Terror, Maistre and Burke had grasped the self-defeating character of revolutionary excess, which made sustained opposition look redundant. The Revolution, to Maistre, was "a monstrous interlude" in an otherwise reasonable and virtuous national history, albeit an interlude with a purpose. As "divine chastisement," the Revolution had purged and rescued France. Recast in terms of his God-governed history, Maistre was echoing Burke's insight into the self-curing character of revolutionary delusion. For the Jacobins, the Revolution itself, Burke wrote, was "just punishment for their success." The liberal middle classes of the 1830s and 1840s did not need reminding that Terror was bad, the wrong way to govern, and, above all, self-destructive.

Neither Burke nor Maistre believed that people in general were capable of self-government, though for different reasons. Maistre took a bleak view of unregenerate humanity. It could never be relied on to keep the rules and it needed harsh discipline and submissive faith together with the threat of swift punishment. Burke was sunnier in his philosophical anthropology. Unlike Maistre, he made no sweeping factual claim that, given a chance, people were free riders (who recognized rules but counted on others to keep them) or wantons (who recognized no rules). The trouble with trusting people to govern themselves lay for Burke not in their inability to keep rules but in their incapacity to make rules. For nobody, strictly, made rules. To think so was the intellectualist mistake of declaration writers and legal codifiers. Rules emerged from custom, and the customs that endured were those that suited a society and its people.

Whether the rules of society came from a divine source, as Maistre insisted, or from custom, as Burke held, their origins were closed to intelligent enquiry. Divine providence was for Maistre inscrutable. The

roots of custom were for Burke obscure. Neither could be argued with and made to yield up a standpoint of criticism for the rules they had generated. Without "ancient opinions and rules of life," Burke wrote, "we have no compass to govern us" and no longer know "to what port to steer." Try as they might, intellectualists in politics could not escape that difficulty. So each claimed.

Neither God's providence nor custom, however, could be relied on alone for social order. Both Maistre and Burke thought a common faith guided and sustained by an established church was also needed. Each recognized the usefulness of religion as a social expedient. Burke made the point soothingly: "The consecration of the state by a state religious establishment is necessary also to operate with a wholesome awe upon free citizens." In a letter in 1815, Maistre declared much the same about faith's utility in terms cynical enough to shock a secularist: "If I were an atheist and a sovereign, . . . I would declare the Pope infallible . . . for the establishment and the safety in my states."

After the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the first conservatives asked themselves whether the turmoil, suffering, and criminal excess had been due to liberty or to its perversion. Burke mildly and Maistre savagely had blamed modern liberty, that is, liberty understood in the wrong way. It was plain to Burke that, once freed from custom and good sense, people were capable of the worst follies and crimes. Maistre thought the same once people were freed from God and his earthly ministers. The foe for Burke was unrestricted, goalless dissent; for Maistre, satanically proud disobedience. For both, mistaken liberty led morally to bewilderment, politically to revolution, breakdown, and counterrevolution. Whether for Burke in this world or for Maistre in a next world, disruptive modern liberty made human life not better, but worse.

Maistre's and Burke's ideas ran side by side into the tradition of conservative thought that was later labelled anti-rationalist. They did not merge. Burke proscribed political reasoning that judged customary arrangements by insecure external standards. He trusted to common morality and social habit that doing without critical reason of the unwanted kind could yet be reasonable. Maistre proscribed reasoning in politics

as such, celebrating instead faith and obedience. The less reasonable anti-reason could be, particularly the more offensive to Enlightened opinion, the more Maistre relished the shock.

In this regard, Burke was more open. In politics, he allowed for faction, argument, and disagreement. He spoke loudly against disrupters who sought to leap out of the frame of common assumptions that made argument possible. That aspect in Burke pointed to eventual accommodation also with liberal diversity. Burke insisted on the need for shared customs and a common faith within a unified society, without which, argument risked slipping into intellectual warfare.

Maistre, by contrast, wanted from politics authority and obedience. His anti-rationalist legacy passed to authoritarian, illiberal conservatism. The legacy runs to Charles Maurras, Georges Sorel, Carl Schmitt, and latter-day right-wing populists. The authority each appealed to varied: for Maistre, the Pope; for Maurras, a French monarch; for Sorel, the disaffected working class; for Schmitt, a temporary dictator; for present-day right-wing populists, "the people," understood as excluding those with views populists dislike as well as elites whom populists of like background seek to replace.

What each of these thinkers wanted from authority was an argument-ender that would cut off debate and silence disagreement. They wanted something that, in the liberal view, would shut down politics itself, because politics to liberals meant unending dispute in a diverse society. The liberal side of Burkeanism could eventually come to terms with that picture of politics as argument. To the Maistrian side, the liberal picture was wrong in whole and part. No reconciliation was possible. Maistre has appealed to the rejectionist element in conservatism and to its authoritarian fringe, as well as to cultural anti-moderns like Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Nietzsche, and their descendants, who relished his mocking disdain.

Unlike Burke, who saw them from the safety of Westminster, revolution and war made Maistre an exile. In 1792, French troops occupied Savoy, part of a dynastic kingdom that included Piedmont and Sardinia. As judge and senator, Maistre feared himself a marked man and fled. Years of wandering began in Switzerland and Italy. After Napoleon

Bonaparte's victories, when Austria ceded its Italian territories to France, the Savoy court decamped to Sardinia. Maistre followed, picturing the rest of his life as that of "an oyster stuck to a rock." In 1802, he was sent to Russia as an envoy. His job was to plead for money and status on behalf of a crown without a kingdom. The Russians had more pressing worries but approved a small subsidy. Many small countries or minor powers were tinder that reignited war after moments of exhaustion in the long European conflict (1792–1815)—Sweden, Canada, Portugal, and the Romanian lands. Sardinia was too small to bother with. Once they grasped how little their island kingdom counted, Maistre's employers in Cagliari cut his pay and told him to shorten his dispatches. Often Maistre ate his servant's soup. In such conditions, Maistre wrote his best-remembered works.

At evening by the Neva River, in the *Petersburg Dialogues* (published posthumously in 1821), a worldly senator, a Catholic nobleman, and a count argue out the problem of evil: how to reconcile belief in an omnicompetent, well-meaning God with the fact of human suffering. Maistre's younger brother, Xavier, an army officer and author of a satire on the Grand Tour, *Journey around My Room* (1794), may have written the descriptive prelude, on the charm of Russian summer nights, which lulls readers for the sustained dialectical skirmish to follow. With more wit and oratory than close argument, the count, speaking for Maistre, puts forth the old Christian answer that human suffering, even undeserved suffering, had its place in an inscrutable divine plan. For God's justice, though perfect, was slow. In human eyes, the innocent suffer and malefactors go free. It may not look it, but on God's plan every ill was compensated for and every crime punished, so long as time was allowed. As a rationale for a moral economics of retributive and compensatory justice, such argument was never going to win adepts in the early nineteenth century, when philosophers were commonly looking for a naturalistic, post-theological grounding to morality. The *Dialogues* contain also Maistre's sallies against Francis Bacon's mechanistic world picture and John Locke's empiricist account of the mind, English thinkers he wished had thought more like Burke.

Of more political moment were Maistre's critique of the Revolution and his constitutional thinking found in the earlier works, *Considerations on France* (1796–97) and *The Generative Principle of Constitutions and Other Human Institutions* (1814). The Revolutionary Terror was God's punishment for Enlightenment denial of faith. Once purged in blood, France merited salvation and was duly rescued by the European allies from Napoleonic captivity. The Enlightenment took a callow view of humanity's preoccupations and capacities that ignored its irrationality and violence, as well as its need for sacrifice, obedience, and submission. There were no presocial humans, but neither was humankind one society. There was no "man in general," only particular men belonging to one of many national types.

Maistre took his predecessors' lessons and drove them to the limit. With David Hume he agreed that feeling, not reason, underlay political obligation, yet what Maistre meant was not worldly prudence and sensible habit, as with Hume, but human self-abnegation and the solidarity of collective guilt. Burke noted that some obligations were not chosen. Maistre insisted that none of our deeper obligations were chosen. Endurance in a human institution was evidence of divine—that is, ungraspable—origin and whatever the human mind could not grasp should not be touched. A state did not win credit by support from an established church; rather, the state itself should make itself sacrosanct. Nations did not have constitutions, let alone write them. Habits, manners, and norms constituted a nation. The most authoritative law was unwritten law. There was no humankind, only the French, Spanish, English, and Russians. Politically, Maistre, following Burke, claimed to reject ideal constructions but insisted that theocracy was the best form of government. Social order was unachievable without an undivided, sovereign power submitted to unquestionably in a latter-day equivalent of religious awe. Institutions could not survive if they were subject to impious doubt: "If you wish to conserve all, consecrate all." Obedience to authority, whether from faith or fear, must be blind and unquestioning, at the risk, otherwise, of anarchy. Maistre's shadeless picture of politics and society was too stark ever to serve as conservatism's official portrait. His overblackened picture of unregenerate, undependable

humankind was still a conservative one. It stood out against the liberal picture, which allowed for human improvability and progress. That liberals could and often did oversweeten their picture in no way erased the contrast.

Readers who come to Burke's works for the first time are struck by their rhetorical power, fertility of metaphor, and subtlety of argumentative suggestion. They are also struck that many or most of the contemporary traditions that Burke was defending as essential to the well-being of society—a dominant landed interest, limited suffrage, an authoritative national church—are long gone. Indeed, they were going or had gone by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by which time conservatives, particularly those in Britain, began to rediscover a forgotten Burke and adopt him as their intellectual godfather. Scared by the Paris Commune (1871) and prodded by Taine's counter-revolutionary history of modern France, conservatives revived Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) as the nearest thing to a founding text. Grand as it is, the work raises a second puzzle, which is, how, for all its literary brilliance, an occasional and in ways polemical work should have earned its high place in conservative thought.

Burke's topical attack on the French Revolution took aim at intellectuals in politics and at the holders of public debt. Burke's "political men of letters" had come to the fore as shapers of public opinion for a growing and demanding readership. The state's creditors had sought profits in lending against the security of nationalized church lands. Intellectuals, tied to no particular class or interest, were prone to indeterminate ideals and callow impracticality. Self-seeking creditors, often foreigners, were anonymous and without stake in France's institutions. Both intellectuals and financiers were given to experiment and innovation, with unpredictable but, as Burke also insisted, reliably grim results. The intellectuals were unflightworthy "aeronauts," both foolhardy and out of touch. Their carping undermined the twin guardians of social "manners" and public faith on which a decent commercial society depended: an open, economically productive aristocracy and a tutelary church. Right or not on those requirements for a decent commercial society, Burke recognized the indecent kind, well aware of what the

colonial rapine by come-and-go fortune hunters had done to Indian society.

The political men of letters in Burke's picture had griped and exaggerated, without presenting a viable alternative. They had delegitimized one institution after another by sapping public faith in social artifice and ignoring the need for a "veil" of unreflecting custom to cloak destructive natural passions. The financiers in their turn had abetted a perilous financial scheme that brought France a ruinous inflation and wrecked public confidence in the state's fiscal responsibility. France's innovators, in sum, had together destroyed the moral authority and monetary trust on which social order depended.

Drawing on a classical sequence of constitutional decline familiar since the Greeks, Burke foresaw growing instability and a descent into anarchy that would be met by popular disorder, growing violence, and, eventually, military rule. Burke's awesome vision, fixed and clear when he began to write late in 1789, struck readers across Europe as prophetic. His reputation as the seer of war, Terror, and Napoleon lent him continent-wide credit in the 1790s but obscured his wider life and writings.

Burke was an outsider who advanced by superabundant talent and good connections in service to the Marquess of Rockingham, a Whig grandee and leader of the anti-ministerial faction in parliament. The Rockingham Whigs wanted to preserve oligarchic government in the interests of landowners and commerce. They were hostile to crown attempts under reforming ministers to limit their power. When Burke spoke of defending tradition, he had that conflict in mind.

A confessional Gemini by family background, Burke had been born in Dublin to a Protestant father and Roman Catholic mother. After Trinity College, the city's Anglican and only university, he studied law in London and made his literary and philosophical name before he was thirty with works that nourished his responses to the Revolution. The ironically entitled *Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) satirized the idea that there had ever been presocial people or that people could be coherently imagined as outside or detached from some particular society. Burke's essay *Of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) invoked a familiar

distinction between the social passion of love and the self-preserving passion of fear in order to enrich the conceptual resources of aesthetics. To love of beauty, Burke added an engaging astonishment at the sublime, that is, at scenes or objects that strike us as overscaled, obscure, or overpowering. In astonishment, an image arises for us of threatened pain at a safe distance, and we sense "tranquillity shadowed with horror." Burke impressed most who met him with his eloquence and argumentative fertility. He became the editor for the *Annual Register*, a yearly review of politics and intellectual life, which he oversaw for many years. In 1765 he obtained a seat in parliament, where he sat till 1794.

Burke was a thinker-advocate, each task locked to the other. As the agent for the New York assembly, he spoke up for its protests against British taxation and in 1775 called for reconciliation in speeches on the American colonies. In ways, Burke was a modernizer and reformer. He wanted a lessening of disabilities for Irish Catholics and a reduction in tariffs so as to collect more revenue from taxes, as well as a cutting of the royal payroll and cleaning up military patronage. In 1783, he and his then ally Charles James Fox wanted the government to wrest the administration of India from the irresponsible, rapacious East India Company. After their bill failed, Burke began a nine-year campaign to impeach the company's governor for malfeasance.

In other ways, Burke was behind his times. He feared the democratization of government and opinion. He rejected John Wilkes's radical proposal for more direct representation by binding members of parliament with written instructions. Burke was leery of banking, which he saw as a spur to "innovation" and a corrupting paymaster for its political friends. Of mobile capital, he wrote: "Being of recent acquisition, it falls in more naturally with any novelties. . . . The kind of wealth which will be resorted to by all who wish for change." That the wealthy should be taxed to reduce poverty Burke thought absurd. Cut the throats of all the rich, Burke wrote, and share what they eat in a year, and it still would not serve. He came to see the slave trade as abhorrent and thought it must end in time. Meanwhile it should be humanized by a code of treatment, not abolished. Among Burke's ideas for improving slaves' lives, drafted in 1780 and sent to a correspondent in 1792, were clothes for

them on slave ships, schooling for slave children, Sundays off, and lashes limited to thirteen at a time. Burke was for religious liberty but spoke against extending it to Unitarian dissenters, who denied the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

The scholar's Burke has been freed in recent decades from his reputational jail as the French Revolution's scold. For most conservatives, he remains the author of the *Reflections*. Without them, people would say what Burke said of Bolingbroke, the Tory butt of his *Vindication*, "Who reads *him* today?" France made and shaped the conservative Burke in reverse. On a visit to Paris in 1773, he marveled at the eighteen-year-old dauphiness but found the godless levity of his intellectual hosts offensive. In May and June 1789, Burke greeted the French upheavals as a "wonderful spectacle." By late summer, when the king's party was in retreat, he turned hostile, provoked partly by the enthusiasm of British radicals. It took his rhetorical skill to balance the jarring claims that Britain should mortally fear a revolution to which, in its stolidity, it was immune.

The authentic, scholar's Burke says too much to be politically useful. "The only specimen of Burke is all that he wrote," Hazlitt quipped in 1807. The first task in creating a useable Burke was accordingly to cherry pick. Burke's copiousness was here an asset, and noticed early. No politician of whatever party, Thomas Moore wrote in 1825, finds himself in "any situation for which he could not select some golden sentence from Burke" to strengthen his argument or "adorn it by fancy."

A second task was to purge the Burkean critique of exaggeration. Maistre's exaggerations were naked and cried out to be scoffed at. Burke's were more suggestive and insinuating: the Terror was as good as fated in 1789, radicals are all revolutionaries, social criticism of any kind is either folly or betrayal, and reform reliably overruns and defeats itself. Although Burke hinted more than stated, exaggeration of that kind became a heady part of what the American political scholar Albert O. Hirschman aptly called "the rhetoric of reaction."

A third task was to rescue Burkeanism from the defense of the undefendable: not simply from the vain defense of what Britain's right-wing Whigs were seeking to preserve from the 1770s through the 1790s, but

from the vain defense of any passing and unstable status quo. The task was to find in Burke's writing answers to the question that recurs for conservatives in capitalist modernity: in an ever-shifting society, where there is never dependable ground underfoot, what can and must be rescued?

Rather than as a guide to the kinds of policy to follow or the types of institution to protect, Burkeanism was accordingly recast so as to offer higher-order, reusable advice in changing circumstances. The advice focused on the prudent management of unavoidable change in order to limit its social disruptiveness. Less was said about the hard part of identifying which values had to be defended. Burkeanism of this second-order kind is rightly thought of as a historically relative Utilitarianism, cast in negative terms: minimize disruption according to what the standards of the day find disruptive.

The distinctive maxims of that higher-order Burkeanism turned on tradition, ignorance, and the vital but vulnerable character of human sociability. By "tradition" was meant norms or institutions handed down from past generations that people at present had a duty to uphold and pass on in good shape. However opaque their origin, the endurance of traditions was first-pass evidence of their legitimacy: "That which might be wrong in the beginning is consecrated by time and becomes lawful." If a tradition was in question, the burden of proof was on its questioner, not the other way around.

Humans' knowledge of themselves and, second, their society was imperfect. Not only were they complex by nature, society itself was growing complex. Prudence called on them not to pretend to know more about either than they did know. It enjoined against making a habit of faultfinding in society and then hunting for cures to overdrawn ills that sped change and often made things worse. Faultfinding suffered typical flaws: it relied on "abstract" claims and it invoked maxims that worked in some places but not in others.

The word "abstract" is both a multipurpose philosophical term of art and a rhetorical term of abuse. Borrowing in his early philosophical writing from Locke, Burke had distinguished three sorts of abstract idea: natural kinds (*trees*, *sheep*, *humans*), properties (*colors*, *shapes*), and

"mixed" ideas such as *virtue, vice, honor, law*, which matched nothing in the natural world but which brought to mind past experiences of virtuous or vicious actions, or previous encounters with, say, soldiers and magistrates. The circularity of reasoning—how might the past action be recognized as, for example, an instance of virtue?—was not convincingly answered by Burke.

In his political writing, "abstraction" became more loosely a term of criticism for the kinds of reasoning that Burke objected to in politics. One was to propose innovative arrangements that had to be talked of in "abstract" terms. Like "virtue," for example, terms for innovative arrangements were innocently abstract in corresponding to nothing in nature. Unlike "virtue," such terms were also culpably abstract. Because they were new, they evoked no past experiences. When an innovation of the suspect kind was spoken of, nothing graspable came to mind. Innovative talk was for Burke a kind of nonsense.

Exporting maxims from where they worked to where they did not work was the second kind of reasoning Burke proscribed. Morals and norms that served all humanity were at their most general, but their specific forms varied locally. They had all grown over time, surviving only because they suited where they grew. Uprooting them in hope they would flourish elsewhere was folly; institutions fitted their nations and were not readily copied. Efforts to speed or reverse social change were equally futile. Revolution and reaction were mirror faults.

Burke's prime exhibit of abstraction was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789). In the declaration, the mistake of France's intellectual men of letters was not that there were no rights—there were rights wherever there was law, and there was law wherever there was society. Those particular rights, however, had all grown up locally in civil society, as tended by an emergent law of the land. There were no uprootable, transportable rights; that is, there were no universal rights. Rights were common to a society, not to humankind.

Reform, in sum, must step away from past practice. Innovation ignored that precept and hence was bound to fail. To the fictive young French correspondent to whom Burke imagined himself writing in *Reflections* he said that France's unwritten constitution had indeed fallen

into disrepair but that it had not been necessary to tear down the building and find a new site. Instead, "you might have repaired those walls, you might have built on those old foundations."

The melancholy modern record of obstinate resistance to wholesale, imposed reform followed by brutal counterresistance might seem to speak in Burke's favor, yet his case against innovative reform relies on an unsupported, backward-looking assumption. A modern society's judgment of whether reform is with or against the grain is seldom clear or conclusive. It is not that modern society, morally speaking, is cross-grained. Even in modernity, there can be a shared core of political morality. The trouble is that in liberal modernity how shared morality is to be applied and adjudged in given cases will always be open to argument. One group's perilous innovation will be another's prudent repair. Simply declaring a harmony of proper morality and custom's lessons does not make that argument go away.

Together the bad habit of abstraction and foolish trust in innovation amounted for Burke to what has here been called intellectualism in politics. It was a fair and useful target for conservatives, who nevertheless soon had to explain how a liberal weakness for intellectualism differed from their own growing reliance on intellectuals, beginning with men like Burke. Despite a professed indifference to ideas, conservatives in time found their own political men of letters. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as will soon be seen, was an early conservative who called for a "clerisy" of brains that, instead of dreaming up possible futures, would identify and promote the upkeep of national traditions.

Burkeanism's third leading theme was that human sociability was universal and everywhere fragile. In whatever society people found themselves, they grew by nurture and education into a "second nature." Burke wrote of that acquired nature as a "cloak" or "veil" of habits, attitudes, and norms. Superficial but vital, they varied from place to place. Whatever local form they took, they were needed for sociability. They might seem old and worn. They might not meet the taste of social critics. But trying to see through them or tear them away was still dangerous. Changing the material of his metaphor, Burke preferred "the rust of superstition" to bumptious critical "impiety."

Once he was canonized for conservatism, the urge to box and re-box Burke never died. Philosophically, he was packaged as a Lockean contractualist, a Humean moral skeptic, a historically minded relativist, a natural-law theorist, or a rule Utilitarian ("In all moral machinery," Burke wrote, "the results are the best"), perhaps both those last two together, the first in morality, the second in politics. Burke himself advanced no philosophical defense in depth of what he was about politically.

Was Burke conservative or a liberal? Of the historical Burke, the question is anachronistic. There were none of either in Burke's day. Still, the question is not pointless, and for Burkeanism the answer is "both," for the Burke distilled into Burkeanism attracted liberals as well as conservatives. Burke said much that right-wing liberals could agree with. Liberty required order, which required property. Tampering with trade was generally a mistake. Many of our duties were unchosen duties, and people had not only rights to liberty but also due expectations for social order.

Burke, more generally, thought healthy politics should reflect society. Society was diverse and in conflict. Politics, accordingly, required faction and argument, as liberals also believed. Sovereign power, further, was necessary but capturable. Institutions for its exercise had to be arranged so that, in Burke's words, no group or interest should "act as if it were the entire master." Avoiding an "entire master" animated the preconservative James Madison in his thoughts on the United States Constitution. It underlay how the liberal François Guizot thought of sovereignty's exercise as lying beyond the reach of any one interest or faction and as controllable in the end only by morality and law. *That* Burke opened paths of liberal-conservative compromise.

Conservatives, however, had fellow feeling for the less liberal, anticosmopolitan Burke. In international terms, he was a conservative nationalist, an early exponent of geopolitics treated as a conflict of ideologies (England, Burke wrote in 1796, "is in war against a principle") or as a down-to-earth defender of British power concerned with efficient taxes, lively commerce, and a stable empire. The national conservative Burke stressed a common faith and shared allegiances as a framework

to contain vigorous faction. He celebrated British customs and attitudes as tested by time and somehow uniquely worthy. That is the Burke who echoed in the patriotic oratory of British conservatism from Benjamin Disraeli to Stanley Baldwin and beyond. It is the Burke who warmed the spirit of an American author shivering in a Scottish winter, Russell Kirk. In *The Conservative Mind* (1953), Kirk not only reminded American readers of Burke's existence but also elevated him into a presiding intellectual deity of that mid-twentieth-century invention, the Anglosphere.

Burke's concern for continuity in the morality of politics was profound and compelling. He handed down to conservatism the puzzle of how to hold to established values amid remorseless modernity. The puzzle was not strictly partisan, but conservatives, especially Burkean conservatives, made it their own. The values Burke had in mind were shared public and private duties, pieties, allegiances, and loyalties, without which, it was feared, social order in modern conditions could never stabilize. The character of the list was plain enough. Giving it actual content in their own times has occupied conservatives of Burkean mold ever since.

ii. The Call of Faith and Beauty: Chateaubriand and Other Romantics

None of Burke's rhetorical flights was better known than his cry of dismay on behalf of the queen when a Parisian crowd burst into the royal palace at Versailles: "I thought ten thousand swords must have leapt from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone." That of "sophisters, economists and calculators" had succeeded. The "sentiments which beautify and soften private society" were vanishing. The decent veils of expedient belief on which social order depended, the "drapery of life" from the "wardrobe of the moral imagination," were, Burke feared, being ripped away.

Burke's fear echoed the alarm at social change sounded by moral satirists from Juvenal to Swift. Manners were changing, it was true, but

whether manners themselves were being abandoned, as Burke seemed to suggest, was less certain. A new fashion is not nakedness. Burke's difficulty was why one should prefer old to new manners once all manners, in the broad sense of social norms, were seen as useful pretenses. If new manners brought stability, then on Burke's own requirements, it would seem they served as well as old manners.

Burke's metaphor of social norms as clothes, later worked up by Thomas Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* (1836) and before long absorbed into the sociological vernacular, had good and bad sides. The good side was that a social norm's authority depended in part on the breadth of its credit. Norms of courtesy, reasonableness, mutual respect, and cooperation are like that. They weaken or break down when widely ignored (which is not to say they must first be widely agreed on to come into force). The bad side of the metaphor is that it threatens to turn acceptance of social norms into expedient dissembling. The metaphor blurs the fact that whereas we cannot see through clothes, we can see through beliefs. Clothes do their work for decency, although we all know what we look like naked. If, on the contrary, social norms are taken for a useful pretense that veils our primitive and asocial nature, it will be perilous to count on them to do their work for social order once the pretense is seen through and constantly remarked on. Keeping up social pretenses is harder than getting dressed in the morning. Philosophers from ancient Greece through the Christian Middle Ages had questioned the force and sources of social norms. Only in the Enlightenment with the spread of reading was the practice of asking why democratized and made part of public argument. Once it had been, as Burke acknowledged, it was difficult to stop the seed of doubt from growing and spreading. Burke's awkward metaphor pointed to an enduring difficulty for conservatives in their contest with liberal modernity. It runs through to the present day: how can we sustain a belief that we are convinced society needs when we ourselves offer not grounds or evidence for the belief but only a conviction that the common holding of the belief is useful for social order?

Another Enlightenment Romantic and critic of the French Revolution, François-René de Chateaubriand, captured the difficulty well.

Lingering aside in distaste, he described the Restoration *sacre* of the last Bourbon, Charles X, by the archbishop of Reims (1825) at the cathedral where French kings had been crowned since the Middle Ages. The jostling attendance included royalist emigrés as well as veterans of the Revolution and Napoleon who had switched coats in time. Who, Chateaubriand asked, could be taken in by such a spectacle? It was "not a *sacre*," he wrote, "but the representation of one."

A younger son from an old Breton noble family, Chateaubriand was by turns naval cadet, apprentice courtier, American voyager, wounded volunteer in the army of the anti-Jacobin emigrés, London exile, best-selling novelist, Catholic revivalist, Napoleonic envoy turned critic of the emperor, constitutional pamphleteer, founder-editor of *Le Conservateur*, Restoration foreign minister, knight errant for the Bourbon Ultras, liberal critic of those same Ultras, defender of the press, and internal exile from the bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe. From that wholly modern muddle of adventure, dissidence, and incompletion, Chateaubriand fashioned an eighteen-hundred-page autobiography that gave shape to the tributaries, diversions, and repetitions that made up his life, the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1849–50), which ranks with Augustine's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* among masterpieces in the unconservative genre of self-invention.

Little of that, though fascinating, would have won Chateaubriand a place in the story of conservatism had he not he passed down to it a repertoire of disavowal for the "empty world" of liberal modernity and a counterpart trust in the "full heart" of faith and loyalty. Chateaubriand was a Romantic among conservatism's anti-rationalist forerunners. He was less philosophical than Burke and, though cross about many things, not as angry as Maistre. As a child of the eighteenth century, he sought to answer disenchantment with reenchantment. Passionate attachments, he urged, counted more in life and politics than prudential reasoning or partisan obedience, a claim he pressed in *Le Génie du Christianisme* (1802), the book that first made his name. Friends saw in him personally a sturdy egotism. Unflatteringly for them, he himself wrote that his strongest emotion was boredom. Many questioned his sincerity,

yet Chateaubriand preached his Romantic gospel of resistance to the emerging world of liberal modernity with a sense of conviction that won converts and imitators.

Politically, he called himself "Republican by nature, monarchist by reason, Bourbonist from honor." Though too skeptical for legitimism, he shared with the Ultras their disgust at watching regicides and Bonapartists land on their feet in the post-1815 Bourbon court. Waiting in an anteroom to see Louis XVIII, as Chateaubriand described the scene in his memoirs, he watched lame Talleyrand, Napoleon's diplomat, shuffle out of an audience with the king helped by Napoleon's police chief, Fouché, and murmured to himself, "Vice supported on the arm of crime." Arbitrary force repelled him, especially by power against defenseless victims. Among the strongest passages in the *Mémoires* is his dry but outraged account of the Duc d'Enghien's execution, with Napoleon's connivance, after a kangaroo trial (1804).

In Chateaubriand's capacity to question almost everything but his own judgment, an ungenerous later French conservative, Maurras, saw a pagan libertarian. Admirers have seen in Chateaubriand's suspicion of power a liberal streak found in the rebel Albert Camus or in the self-described Tory anarchist George Orwell.

Chateaubriand believed in a constitutional monarchy, in representative government constrained by fixed, nondemocratic institutions that were designed to ensure security of property and protect subjects from arbitrary power. He believed also in personal liberties and freedom of the press. He blamed the Revolution on royal dithering and interference, and he supported the Bourbons not from out-of-the-drawer legitimist theory but for the practical and somewhat cross-cutting reason that the dynasty had, broadly speaking, provided good rulers. After 1815 he believed in a "possible Restoration," not in the self-defeating reaction of the Ultras. It was folly, Chateaubriand thought, to bring back old congregations, compensate property losses, restore primogeniture, muzzle the press, and make sacrilege a capital offense. To Louis de Bonald, the author of that last bill (1825), he cried in the chamber, "You reject the norms of our day to return to times we cannot even recognize."

For all that, Chateaubriand could sound like a proto-liberal, which in a limited way he might have been, except for his distance from middle-class life and values.

Chateaubriand shared that suspicion of bourgeois society and what he took for its politics of mutual interest in an article in *Le Conservateur*. It contrasted a "morality of interest" with a "morality of duty." Society could not be governed by violence, only by *séduction*, that is, persuasion. The persuasive force of mutual interest, it might be said, could be stronger than that of duty; for duty rested on "fiction," whereas interest was actual. No, Chateaubriand answered. Interest was fickle and unstable, never by evening what it was in the morning, resting on no more than chance and ever fluid. There existed by contrast an unbreakable chain of duty running from families into society that tied fathers and children, kings and their subjects, into mutual obligations.

Like William Wordsworth in Britain and Adam Müller in Germany, Chateaubriand disliked the commercial society he saw eating away at an earlier, supposedly more natural way of life. The natural life was imagined socially in terms of older habits and institutions, and psychogeographically in terms of the countryside, especially wild countryside. Were that all, Chateaubriand's writing might have gone the way of Étienne Sénancour's *Obermann* and other writers of the day swept up in the Romantic idea of pure nature and tainted society. In addition, he had a hard, knowing eye for worldly affairs and an ambition, however misplaced, to fight at the top of the political game. Some saw in his obsession with Napoleon an unhinged wish to supplant Napoleon. Chateaubriand's Romantic side, which he poured into his novels, imagined America as a Rousseauesque open field, cherished and tended by wise original peoples. His worldly side reminded him how it was. On arrival in Delaware, he was helped on to the dock by a young black woman, to whom he gave a handkerchief, noting to himself how incongruous it was to be greeted in the land of liberty by a slave.

Le Génie du Christianisme caught a moment of religious conciliation. It was published soon after Napoleon's Concordat with the Vatican in 1801 reestablished Roman Catholicism as the primary religion of France and permitted the return of emigré priests. *Le Génie* aimed to reawaken

religious feeling by stressing the aesthetic aspects of Christianity and helped make it acceptable, even fashionable, in intellectual drawing rooms. It contributed to the Catholic revival after 1815, when peace returned, military careers closed, and a religious calling looked again to be a fair alternative among the upper classes.

As a Counter-Enlightenment manifesto for the beauties of the Christian faith, *Le Génie* tied together Romantic longing, contempt for bourgeois worldliness, and Catholic lessons in piety and humility. By rejecting false gods, Christianity had ended our intellectual infancy but compensated us for the loss of childish wonder. By chasing divinities from the woods and returning nature to its solitude, Christianity had given us an object of solace, contemplation, and religious awakening. Worldly busyness and its reductive understanding of life had limits. We needed ritual. Whether classical or Christian, ritual appealed to us in its poetry. Nothing was lovely, winning, or beautiful without an element of mystery. Religion deepened art by pointing us toward ideals that could be intuited, not justified. Last, self-assertive mockery was corrosive and deadening. Among the enemies of Christian piety from the start had been sectarians, sophists, and the frivolous who "destroy everything with laughter." Christianity, into the bargain, had served sound government and blessed the forgiveness of enemies in the cause of national reconciliation.

The topics that moved Chateaubriand and that were widely anthologized from the six-part *Génie* were ruins, oceans, feast days, church bells, and love of nation. That last element, which was foreign to Catholic universalism but not to Gallicanism, belonged indispensably to Chateaubriand's politics of feeling and allegiance. A common religion was one way in which a shared allegiance might heal a divided nation. The nation itself was another. Tapping patriotic feeling to unite a country against its internal foes became a theme for the nineteenth-century right, for use first against liberalism and later against international socialism. Nor for Chateaubriand was the pursuit of French pride mere literary exhortation. As foreign minister he promoted, against British reservations, an invasion of Spain to crush its liberals (1823) and pressed for an alliance with Russia to break up the Ottoman Empire, for a

French foothold in Latin America, and for a "just expansion" of France's frontier along the Rhine. Napoleon III eventually tried all of it, with disastrous results for France and Europe. Charles de Gaulle, an admirer of Chateaubriand's prose, also heard his cry: "I wanted the French to want glory." De Gaulle, however, understood France's limits. By his time, national glory was not on offer. The representation of glory had to serve in its place.

Appended to *Génie* were the wildly popular Romantic novellas, *René* and *Atala*, which were written or published earlier. Their antihero, René, is an unhappy young man without a home in society who, unlike Goethe's Werther, rather than kill himself seeks purpose from life in the American woods. These short works counted heavily toward the success of a long book that Chateaubriand made longer by adding doctrine and theology, as if to appease serious Christian thinkers who expected better defenses of faith's claims to truth than his "I wept, so I believed." Chateaubriand's religion of sentiment had limits, but it lit up a problem facing later conservatives looking to Christianity to provide a civic religion that liberal modernity, they believed, was too thin and too divisive on its own to allow for. Félicité de Lamennais, a cofounder of *Le Conservateur*, was one of several nineteenth-century conservative religious thinkers—Wilhelm von Ketteler, John Henry Newman, Charles Hodge, and Orestes Brownson—who, as will be seen, also hoped to reconcile faith and modernity.

Maistre, Burke, and Chateaubriand each handed down to conservatism an intellectual target for use by the right against the left. The target could be thought of as a triangle that might be hit on any one of its sides: an apostasy or denial; a wrong way of thinking; and a suspect kind of thinker. First, revolutionaries denied divine providence (Maistre), custom and tradition (Burke), or enchantment (Chateaubriand). Second, they thought about politics in the wrong way, whether by corrosive "raison individuelle" (Maistre), delusory "pure metaphysical abstraction" (Burke), or the deadening "l'esprit positif" (Chateaubriand). Just what those highly general charges were and whether they were one charge or many were left to conservatives to wrestle later in the twentieth century, when efforts were made to give the idea

rationalism in politics more philosophical shape and weight. In contrast, the third side of the triangle, the suspect intellectual, gave a clear, palpable target. Revolutionary thinkers, on this last charge, were "men of letters" without recognized status or interests of their own save the practice of moral and political criticism itself. Their aim was not, as they proclaimed, to make a new, better, or reformed society but rather to maintain unending argument about a new, better, or reformed society. For only unending argument gave political men of letters a rationale. The political intellectual, on that unflattering picture, was a half-trained doctor who was quick to spot ailments, real or imagined, but with no grasp of health and no ability to cure.

iii. Order in Nations and Among Nations: Gentz and Other Germans

The right might abjure intellectualism in politics, but it needed brains of its own who could take on the intellectuals of the left. An outstanding early model was Friedrich von Gentz (1764–1832), who spent a career of drafting and arguing in the service of established order, both within and among the nations of Europe. For intellectual combat of that kind, he was well equipped. As a young man, he went to Königsberg with a recommendation from Moses Mendelssohn to study under Immanuel Kant, heard him lecture, corrected the proofs of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, and was returned to his father, in the philosopher's words, "in good health and well-schooled." Besides translating the first French critics of the Revolution, in 1793 Gentz put into German Burke's *Reflections*, teasing out Burke's thought in long footnotes that tidied up the argument in rationalist spirit.

Revolution for Gentz was not an assault by reason but an assault on reason. The revolutionary error to his mind was not reasoning about politics in strange ways that were wrong even when done well, but reasoning in familiar ways, only doing it badly. Revolution was not as for Burke an attack on custom by reason but an attack by poor reasoning on good. For Gentz, the primary question of politics was how power

was best used for the maintenance of peace and stability, both within and among nations. If that was an "abstract" principle, so be it. If broad maxims drawn from some combination of prudence, reasoning, and experience were "abstract," so be it. Gentz was not interested in fighting battles against the Enlightenment, nor after his early sallies was he much involved in philosophy.

Gentz's thought looked back and ahead. It looked back to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century modern tradition of *raison d'état* (the idea, present in the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, that obligations on states and their trustees were specific to politics and not neatly exportable from the sphere of personal morality). It looked forward to what later became known as realpolitik, or realism (the idea that geopolitics, the first element of statecraft, involved an amoral contest among sovereign nations unregulated by supranational norms or ideals save rudimentary counsels of prudence). For Gentz, reasoning well about politics meant thinking out what *raison d'état* required in the turbulent status quo of revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe. For later conservative realists, his question generalized. In whatever turbulent status quo they found themselves, they too had to ask, "What here and now does *raison d'état* require?"

Established as a lawyer and state official in Berlin, Gentz ran the journals *New German Monthly* (1795) and the *Historical Journal* (1799). His grasp of foreign affairs and finance won him a reputation. When his hostility to Napoleon left him politically homeless in peace-seeking Prussia, he left for Vienna (1802), where he worked as a writer-adviser for hire to the Austrians and British. French occupation (1805) made him an exile again, but he was back in Vienna by 1810 as an aide to the Austrian chancellor, Metternich. Pleas for a court post went unheard, and he operated as a commoner with only Metternich's protection. As drafter and frequently creative notetaker, he was at the five post-Napoleonic congresses. Although no democrat, he thought the idea of restoring France's Bourbons after 1830 by force absurd, and lost the chancellor's favor.

A rake and gambler ever in debt, Gentz was frowned on by the pious. In his sixties, he fell in love with an eighteen-year-old dancer, the

daughter of Joseph Haydn's copyist, who without claiming to be faithful made him happy in old age. Romantic conservatives took Gentz for an eighteenth-century leftover, democrats and socialists for a reactionary, and Prussian nationalists for a faithless cosmopolitan. He was little read and soon forgotten. He reads today more like a familiar, realist conservative than his backward-looking contemporaries. As a political intellectual serving the chancelleries of Europe, Gentz's first concern was less with speculating about how power should be exercised than vindicating how it was exercised. He was an early model of a familiar present-day figure, the clever policy intellectual with top degrees circulating between right-wing think tanks, conservative magazines, and political leaders' private offices.

In thinking about revolution, Gentz was an enthusiast for 1789. He followed Kant in taking the National Assembly for legitimate and not, as Burke claimed, a usurpation of royal authority; however, Gentz soon turned against the Revolution. The revolutionaries' mistake was not in having universal, innovative ideals, it was in leaving them general, unanchored, and out of practical reach. Gentz did not mock the Declaration of the Rights of Man in the satirical manner of Justus Möser (1720–94), the north-Saxon critic of market society and Enlightenment princely reform. Nor did Gentz fault the declaration, as Burke had done, for misunderstanding the character of rights. Gentz instead subjected the declaration to an article-by-article critique (1793) for errors of drafting and logic in the manner of a philosophically attuned lawyer. The declaration to his mind was not so much misconceived as ill-done.

Gentz wrote not as a philosopher but as a publicist and political adviser. He understood the role of political intellectuals as laying out simple principles and defending the policies of their political masters in depth. Gentz's essay "On the Balance of Power" (1806) spelled out the guidelines for European peace that served the post-Napoleonic settlements. Within states, locally chosen arrangements, republican or monarchical, should prevail unless they upset continental order. In the German lands—Prussia, Austria, and the other territories of the defunct Holy Roman Empire—politics should promote faith (which fostered obedience) and hold democracy at bay.

A defender of free opinion as an editor in Berlin, Gentz supported its suppression in the press and universities in the climate of reaction after 1815. Public opinion, he wrote, should be formed, not followed. Afraid of Prussian domination, Gentz opposed confederal institutions that might serve to unite Germany as well as Friedrich List's common market. As for nascent socialism, it was to be stifled at birth. Over dinner at the Congress of Aix (1818), Gentz suavely told the cooperativist Robert Owen: "We do not want the mass to become wealthy and independent of us. How could we govern them if they were?"

Gentz's tone and style were at their clearest in *On the State of Europe before and after the French Revolution* (1801), his reply to the case against Britain by Alexandre d'Hauterive, Napoleon's diplomatic aide. Monarchy had not brought eighteenth-century Europe to darkness and poverty, Gentz argued; rather, reforming monarchs across the continent had raised standards of living. War had broken out in 1792 not because of British belligerence, but because the Westphalian system had broken down under the weight of Prussian growth, Russian pressure, and the general growth of trade. British commercial interests had not prejudiced France; the Navigation Acts hindered Britain more than they did its competitors. Britain had not exploited superior naval power; it had fought at sea through the eighteenth century on equal terms. France and Britain were both colonial powers, neither with a clear advantage. Nor did Britain monopolize industry; its products sold widely in Europe because they were better. They were better because Britain had freed itself from false economic doctrines. Gentz was on retainer from the British and writing what he judged served his masters' cause. What strikes the present-day reader is a tone familiar from "realist" conservatism: the coolly factual style; the confident dismissal of radical claims, especially claims about the dismal past; and a presumptive framework of competitive national goals.

Gentz had tried at first to engage in the dispute among German philosophers about the nature and desirability of the French Revolution but soon withdrew, aware that his talents lay elsewhere. The leading philosophers in Germany—Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, J. G. Fichte, and G.W.F. Hegel—were, to begin with, favorable on the whole

about the Revolution. They saw in it, each in their way, hope for social progress and a more reasonable politics. Kant thought that although there was no right to rebellion in general, the French Revolution might prove beneficial if people's enthusiasm turned to civic engagement and support for a constitution. As if to welcome to its cause the author of the anti-tyrannical play *The Robbers*, the French republic made Schiller an honorary citizen (1792). Schiller greeted 1789 as a step for freedom but wondered if people were ready for it, writing to a friend in 1793, "You have to constitute citizens before you can give them a constitution." The Terror shocked even progressive German opinion. The change was evident in Hegel's work, when he looked back in the 1800s. Fichte, who blamed the Terror on the belligerence of France's neighbors, had at first to fight off claims by German reactionaries that he was a Jacobin. But Fichte himself then turned against the Revolution when France (1806–7) turned against Prussia.

Less well-known thinkers who influenced later German conservatives were against revolution from the outset. August Rehberg (1757–1836) was a German Burkean and scholar from Hanover who took the Revolution to be antihistorical. He mistrusted broad, universal principles and faulted the French Revolution for flying against what was locally achievable at that moment in history. A defender of Germany's small states and an opponent of centralism, Rehberg was not against change or reform itself but only change in the wrong hands. With that in mind, he called on Germany's privileged classes to reform themselves. He disapproved of Kant's rationalistic enthusiasm, as he saw it, for 1789. Rehberg took Kant's support for the Revolution as a failure to gauge the gap between universal maxims and their practical achievability. For the political romanticism of his friend Adam Müller (1779–1829), Gentz had little patience. However sharp was Müller's critique of new ways to think of state and society, Gentz took his approach as backward looking. Müller's hopes for preserving Germany's legally privileged classes, its old "estates," and restoring an imagined premodern unity struck Gentz as out of touch. Revolution had to be fought, Gentz insisted, not with nostalgia but with modernity's own weapons.

Hegel is a telling bookend to German reactions to the French Revolution. Like Kant, the liberal Hegel believed that satisfactory arrangements in politics must be reasonable. They must, that is, be intelligible and acceptable to those who must live under them. Those conditions of acceptability and intelligibility need not, however, be the same for everyone at all times. Reason, on Hegel's view, ought not to try to apply itself in isolation from the society in which people found themselves. France's revolutionaries pressed too fast with principles that were too detached from actual circumstances. The Revolution took a wrong turn, left history's "rational" march for freedom, and slipped into violent unreason. The Terror, on that understanding, was a contingent horror, as little part of an intelligible human history, Hegel wrote, as "chopping the head off a cabbage." Instead, in Hegel's superhistory the motor force of history—humanity's urge for freedom—passed in Napoleon's hands from France to Germany, where the old, "irrational" patchwork of the German empire was discarded and political freedom found new expression in Prussian constitutionalism.

After his death, Hegel's heritage divided like the French assembly into right and left. Right Hegelians were on the whole religion-minded conservatives who found in his works a vindication of prevailing arrangements, understood as the achievement of world history's march toward freedom in Prussian constitutionalism. The left Hegelians took from Hegel a tool for the criticism of prevailing arrangements, understood as only the latest stage in an unfinished struggle for recognition by the weak against the strong. In its Marxist variant, left Hegelianism turned world history into a tradition of revolution.

Hegel himself paid little attention to the recent revolution in America. In the early 1820s, the oversight made sense. In his *Philosophy of History* (1822), Hegel took the new country as too fluid and open in its likely futures to say anything world-historical about it. Such philosophical caution had been no constraint on Gentz, the policy intellectual, when thinking of contemporary upheaval and war experienced by peoples across the Atlantic world. Two decades earlier, he had written a spirited essay contrasting the French and American Revolutions, which was published in his *Historical Journal*. Its characteristic brio

caught the eye of the American envoy in Berlin, the young John Quincy Adams, later president and a leading conservative Whig. Adams translated the essay and had it published soon after in the United States (1800). He was glad to welcome an article from "one of the most distinguished political writers in Germany." For Adams, it rescued the American Revolution "from the disgraceful imputation of having proceeded from the same principles as that of France."

iv. Revolution to Prevent Revolution: Madison and Other Americans

The left charged supporters of 1776 who opposed 1789 with inconsistency. The charge was commonplace across the Atlantic world and needed answering by the right. In Europe, it was heard against Burke. In the United States, it was popular among Jeffersonian anti-Federalists. Gentz's answer to the charge was scholastic and lawyerly. As he described them, the American Revolution was defensive; the French, offensive. The Americans were defending established rights that had been injured or abridged by the British. Their aims were fixed and limited. Revolution prompted little resistance from within the colonies; widespread support for independence created a nation. The French Revolution stood in contrast on each point. The revolutionaries usurped power and trampled on rights. They had no aim but set off "in a thousand various directions, continually crossing each other." Far from creating a unified nation, they provoked a mass of resistance and plunged the country into civil war. The good American and the bad French Revolutions became part of conservatism's intellectual armory.

In fact, there was not just one American response to the French Revolution but varied, shifting responses. The Americans in Paris—Thomas Jefferson and Gouverneur Morris—offer a telling contrast. Jefferson was the American envoy in Paris (1785–89), sent there the year before to join Benjamin Franklin and John Adams in negotiating commercial and diplomatic treaties with the major powers. When it came, France's revolution excited him. He believed in "the good sense of man" and his

"capacity for self-government." If reason could exert its force, Jefferson was confident he was seeing the "first chapter of European liberty" (August 1789). He did not feel tied to past, believing with Thomas Paine that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living."

Jefferson took events in France and America as expressions of popular resistance. Two years earlier, rioting by armed country debtors in Massachusetts who stormed a tax house had scared the wealthy and powerful of the new land, but not Jefferson. "I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the atmosphere," he wrote in a letter brushing off the affair (February 1787). Jefferson looked on government as dangerous to people's liberty. Rulers needed warning from time to time that people "preserve the spirit of resistance," he wrote of popular unrest in general later that same year. The answer was not violence but conciliation. "Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon & pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants. It is its natural manure" (November 1787).

In May 1789, Jefferson, now envoy for the United States, eagerly attended the Estates General. To James Madison back home he wrote of what he took for a French sense of common enterprise: "Our proceedings have been viewed as a model for them on every occasion." The American constitution was treated "like . . . the bible, open to explanation but not to question." With the Marquis de Lafayette, Jefferson began to sketch out a declaration of rights for France.

Jefferson's successor as American envoy when he returned to America in autumn 1789 was a constitutional monarchist, the wealthy New Yorker Gouverneur Morris (1752–1816). A frequent speaker at the Constitutional Convention (1787), he had chaired the Committee on Style, which wrote the final draft and added the phrase with its fateful pronoun which opens the Preamble, "We, the people of the United States." A strong federalist, he was antislavery but exclusive in his understanding of democracy. Morris believed, like the conservative Whigs to come, that substantial property was a requirement for political participation. Morris was an exemplar of what Jefferson later called the "Anglo-Monarchio-Aristocratic" Federalists—the bankers for commerce and

(continued...)

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SUBJECT INDEX

Where the sense of a term as used in this book is explained in "Conservative Keywords" (Appendix A), the entry here is in italics. Where listed without comment or attribution, ideas indexed here are to be taken *de dicto* as they occur in conservative thoughts and arguments dealt with in the book.