

剑桥政治思想史原著系列（影印本）

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

对法兰西的思考

Considerations on France

Joseph de Maistre

约瑟夫·德·梅斯特尔

Edited by

RICHARD A. LEBRUN

Introduction by

ISAIAH BERLIN

中国政法大学出版社

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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
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JOSEPH DE MAISTRE
Considerations on France

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Joseph de Maistre's *Considerations on France* is the best known French equivalent of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. This new edition of Richard Lebrun's 1974 translation is introduced by Isaiah Berlin, with a bibliography and chronology by the translator. Published in 1797, the work of the self-exiled Maistre presents a providential interpretation of the French Revolution and argues for a new alliance of throne and altar under a restored Bourbon monarchy. Although the Directory and then Napoleon delayed Maistre's influence within France until the Restoration, he is now acknowledged as the most eloquent spokesperson for continental conservatism. *Considerations on France* was a shrewd piece of propaganda, but, as Isaiah Berlin contends, by arguing his case in broad historical, philosophical and religious terms, Maistre raises issues of enduring importance.

剑桥政治思想史原著系列

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在政治理论领域，“剑桥政治思想史原著系列”作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

本丛书已出版著作的书目，请查阅书末。

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Note on the Introduction

Isaiah Berlin's introduction began life as a radio lecture, given on the Third Programme of the BBC on 3 December 1952, the last in a series of six entitled 'Freedom and its Betrayal'. The version that appears here is a transcript of that lecture, edited for publication by Henry Hardy. The informality and rhetorical qualities of the lecture, which was not given from a fully prepared text, have on the whole been deliberately preserved; and no changes of substance have been made with this new context in mind. Readers interested in a fuller account of Isaiah Berlin's views on Maistre may consult his long essay, 'Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism', which appears in his book, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, edited by Henry Hardy (London, 1990; New York, 1991). It will be clear to anyone who consults Richard Lebrun's own studies of Maistre (listed in the Bibliography, p. xl) that he is not entirely in agreement with the interpretations offered in the introduction.

Introduction

ISAIAH BERLIN

I

Joseph de Maistre was a very frightening figure to many of his contemporaries – frightening because of what he wrote rather than because of what he was. Indeed his contemporaries had not very much chance of meeting him, since the most important years of his life were spent in the service of the King of Sardinia, and at the court of St Petersburg, to which he was appointed as diplomatic representative. He was frightening to them because of the violence, the intransigence and the extremely uncompromising and hard-headed dogmatism with which he wished to strike down the doctrines of which he disapproved.

The normal view of him is fairly stated by Émile Faguet, perhaps the most accurate and the fairest-minded critic of Maistre in France in the nineteenth century. He calls Maistre 'a fierce absolutist, a furious theocrat, an intransigent legitimist, apostle of a monstrous trinity composed of Pope, King and Hangman, always and everywhere the champion of the hardest, narrowest and most inflexible dogmatism, a dark figure out of the Middle Ages, part learned doctor, part inquisitor, part executioner'.¹ And again, 'his Christianity is terror, passive obedience and the religion of the State';² his faith is merely 'a slightly touched-up paganism';³ he is a 'Praetorian of the

¹ Émile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes du dix-neuvième siècle*, 1st series (Paris, 1899): p. 1.

² *ibid.*, p. 59.

³ *ibid.* ('un paganisme un peu "nettoyé"').

Vatican'.⁴ An admirer speaks of his 'Christianity of terror';⁵ Edgar Quinet, a Protestant under the influence of the German romantics, writes of Maistre's 'inexorable God aided by the hangman; the Christ of a permanent Committee of Public Safety';⁶ and in our own day the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno refers to Maistre's 'slaughter-house'.⁷

This is the usual portrait of him, largely invented by Sainte-Beuve, and perpetuated by various other thinkers in the nineteenth century. Maistre is painted, always, as a fanatical monarchist and a still more fanatical supporter of papal authority; proud, bigoted, inflexible, with a strong will and an unbelievable power of rigid reasoning from dogmatic premisses to extreme and unpalatable conclusions; brilliant, embittered, a medieval doctor born out of his time, vainly seeking to arrest the current of history; a distinguished anomaly, formidable, hostile, solitary and ultimately pathetic; at best a tragic patrician figure, defying and denouncing a shifty and vulgar world, into which he had been incongruously born; at worst an unbending, self-blinded die-hard pouring curses upon the marvellous new age whose benefits he was too wilful to see, and too callous to feel.

His works are regarded as interesting and *outré* rather than important – the last despairing effort of feudalism in the dark ages to resist the march of progress. He is described either as a brave but doomed paladin of a lost cause, or as a foolish or odious survival of the older and more heartless generation, according to whatever attitude the nineteenth-century critics happen to take. But both sides, whether for or against him, always assume that his day is done, that his world has no relevance to anything contemporary. This is the point of view which is shared alike by Victor Hugo and Lamennais, by Sainte-Beuve and Faguet, by James Stephen and Morley, and particularly by Harold Laski, who wrote an essay on him in which he took the view that Maistre was to be rejected as a played-out force.

This view, which may have been intelligible in the nineteenth century, seems absurd in the present age. For although Maistre may

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵ S. Rocheblave, 'Étude sur Joseph de Maistre', *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 2 (1922), p. 312.

⁶ E. Quinet, *Le Christianisme et la Révolution française* (Paris, 1845), pp. 357–8.

⁷ '[E]l matadero del difunto conde José de Maistre'. Miguel de Unamuno, *La agonía del cristianismo*: p. 308 in *Obras completas*, ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid, 1966–), vol. vii.

have spoken the language of the past, the content of what he had to say is the absolute substance of anti-democratic talk of our day; in comparison with his progressive contemporaries he is really ultra-modern, born not so much after as before his time. If his ideas did not have more immediate influence, it is because the soil in his own time was unreceptive. His doctrines, and still more his attitude of mind, had to wait a century before they came – as come they did – into their own.

II

Maistre's task, in his own eyes, was to destroy everything which the eighteenth century had built up. Let me explain how he came by this state of mind. He was born in 1753 in Chambéry in Savoy, then part of the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, which was relatively enlightened in the eighteenth century, having abolished feudalism a good many years before the French did so. Like other liberal aristocrats, Maistre was a mild reformer, not particularly reactionary and not particularly bigoted. He was a grown man when the Revolution finally broke out. He was over thirty, and like others who went through the Revolution – like Saint-Simon, like Schiller, like Hegel – he took most violently against it. The spectacle of the Jacobin Terror was something which he never forgot for the rest of his life, and this is what turned him into an implacable enemy of everything that is liberal, democratic, high-minded, everything connected with intellectuals, critics, scientists, everything which was to do with the kind of forces which created the French Revolution. When he talks about Voltaire he talks about him almost as if he were a personal enemy.

Being a Savoyard, Maistre entered the royal service, and began writing pamphlets, after the French revolutionaries had invaded Savoy, against the Revolution. These pamphlets were very sharp: they had a peculiar freshness, indeed a ferocity, which immediately attracted attention. But the King of Sardinia felt that he was an uncomfortable man to have about the court. The court was very small, very limited, rather provincial, and Maistre was too brilliant, too active, too imaginative and too interesting a man to be altogether comfortable there. But he was obviously very able, and he attracted a great deal of attention by the brilliance of his writings. Consequently it was decided to send him as far away as possible, and he was duly

sent away to St Petersburg as a minister of the King of Sardinia, or the equivalent of a minister, from 1803 until he left in 1817.

In St Petersburg he was regarded as a man of particular charm, courtesy, urbanity; he was a brilliant and agreeable conversationalist, delightful company and greatly sought after in society. He enjoyed his life in St Petersburg; he was fascinated by the Russian monarchy, and he got on very well with the immediate circles around Alexander I; indeed that Emperor used him as a political adviser at various moments during his reign.

After the war against Napoleon was over, for some reason Alexander demanded his recall; it may be that he had converted too many ladies of fashion to the Roman Church. Several of these ladies were destined to play a very large part in Catholic circles in Western Europe. Possibly he interfered a little too much in Russian policy, with so strong a personality; at any rate, the King of Sardinia, now restored to his throne, was induced to recall him. He went back to Turin, the capital, was given a sinecure, and died, in considerable honour but with no kind of political power, or indeed any other kind of power, in 1821. His reputation is largely posthumous.

III

The aim to which Maistre addressed himself most vigorously, as I say, was to destroy the eighteenth century, and the thought of the eighteenth century. It is a mistake to assume that the thought of the eighteenth century was a seamless garment; indeed, some of the eighteenth-century thinkers were divided by deep differences. But there are certain things which are common to them all. They might not all believe in progress; they might not all believe in God; they might not all believe in the immortality of the soul. Some of them believed in intuition; others believed in empiricism. Some believed in spontaneity and simplicity of feeling; others believed in science and sophistication. What they had in common was the belief that men were by nature, if not good, at any rate not bad, potentially benevolent, and that each man was the best expert on his own interests and his own values, when he was not being bamboozled by knaves or fools; that on the whole men were prone to follow the rules of conduct which their own understanding suggested to them. Most thinkers of the eighteenth century believed that progress was desirable – that is

to say, for example, that freedom is better than slavery; that legislation founded on what was called 'the precepts of nature' could right almost every wrong; that nature was only reason in action, and its workings, therefore, could in principle be deduced from a set of axioms like those of a theory in geometry, or like those of physics and chemistry, if only you knew them. They believed that all things that were good and true and virtuous and free were necessarily compatible, and indeed more than that, that they were interconnected. The more empirically minded among them were sure that the science of human nature could be developed no less than that of inanimate things, that ethical and political questions, provided they were genuine – and how could they not be so? – could be answered no less certainly than those of mathematics and astronomy, and that a life founded upon these answers would be free, secure, happy and wise. They believed that the millennium could be reached by the use of faculties and the practice of methods which had for over a century, in the spheres both of knowledge and of action, led to triumphs more magnificent than any hitherto attained in human history. That, roughly speaking, is the common belief, the general temper and attitude, of the rational thinkers of the eighteenth century.

All this Maistre set himself to destroy completely. Any characteristic of the eighteenth century of this kind he was determined to root up so that it should stand no more. He took on this enormous task because he believed that the Revolution in which the innocent had suffered was an appalling disaster. He had loved and admired France from outside (he was on the margins of it in Savoy) with the peculiar passion which people on the edges of countries have for those countries when they wish to be identified with them – there are many instances of this in history. With the peculiar indignation born of the desire to demolish a really golden ideal, he determined to discredit the forces which in his opinion were responsible for the destruction of his dream. Therefore, in place of the *a priori* formulae of idealistic sociology, he decided to appeal to the empirical facts of history and to observe human behaviour. In place of the ideals of progress, liberty, perfectibility he preached the sacredness of the past, the virtue, and the necessity, indeed, of complete subjection, because of the incurably bad and corrupt nature of man. In place of science he preached the primacy of instinct, superstition, prejudice. In place of optimism, pessimism. In place of eternal harmony and eternal peace, the neces-

sity – for him the divine necessity – of conflict, of suffering, of bloodshed, of war. In the place of peace and social equality, of common interests and the simple nature of the uncorrupted natural man about whom Rousseau had talked, he insisted that what was important was diversity, inequality, conflict of interests – those were the normal conditions of individuals and of nations. He denied all meaning to such abstractions as Nature, Man, Natural Rights. His doctrine of language contradicted everything which Condorcet and Condillac and all the great scientists of the eighteenth century had tried to formulate. He tried to breathe new life into the discredited doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. He defended the importance of mystery, of darkness, almost of ignorance, and above all of irrationality, as the basis of social and political life. With immense effectiveness and brilliance he denounced every form of lucidity, every form of rationality. Temperamentally Maistre was as ruthless and as extreme as his great enemies, the Jacobins; and he had something of their faith and their integrity.

Alexander Herzen, the Russian revolutionary, remarks that what distinguished the men of 1792 was the wonderful completeness of their rejection of the entire old order. He says that they denounced not merely its vices, but all its virtues too. They wished to leave nothing standing, they wanted to destroy the entire evil system, root and branch, in order to build up something absolutely fresh, entirely pure. They wanted to make no compromise; they wanted to have no debt to that upon whose ruins their new cities would be raised. Maistre was the exact inverse of this. He attacked eighteenth-century rationalism with the intolerance and the passion and the power and the gusto of the great revolutionaries themselves. He wanted to destroy what has been so well called 'the heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers'.⁸ He wanted to raze it to the ground, not leaving stone upon stone.

The method which he used, as well as the truths which he preached, although he officially said he derived them from Thomas à Kempis or Thomas Aquinas, or the great preachers of the seventeenth century in France, Bourdaloue or Bossuet, in fact displays very little of the spirit of these great pillars of the Church. They had far more to do with the anti-rationalist approach of someone like

⁸ The title of a book (New Haven, 1932) by Carl L. Becker.

Augustine, or with the Freemasons and the illuminists among whom Maistre's youth was spent.

IV

Maistre's fundamental doctrine is this: nature is red in tooth and claw, it is a vast scene of carnage and destruction. The men of the eighteenth century turn to metaphysics, to logic, even to geometry, in order to find out what nature is like. Those are not the sources of our knowledge of nature. If they want to talk about nature, let them be serious. They speak about using observation as a weapon, using our eyes, not accepting a great many dogmatic truths merely because a lot of preachers have spoken to us about them. Very well, then, they must be taken at their word. Let us look at what is going on round us, Maistre says, let us not look at books, let us look at nature, at ourselves, let us study history, yes, and zoology. They are the true guides to nature. What do we see if this is where we look? Let me quote what Maistre says:

In the vast domain of living nature there reigns an open violence, a kind of prescriptive fury which arms all the creatures to their common doom. As soon as you leave the inanimate kingdom, you find the decree of violent death inscribed on the very frontiers of life. You feel it already in the vegetable kingdom: from the vast catalpa to the humblest herb, how many plants *die*, and how many are *killed*! But from the moment you enter the animal kingdom, this law is suddenly in the most dreadful evidence. A violent power, at once hidden and palpable . . . has in each major subdivision of the animals appointed a certain number of species to devour the others. Thus there are insects of prey, reptiles of prey, birds of prey, fishes of prey, quadrupeds of prey. There is no instant of time when one creature is not being devoured by another. Over all these numerous races of animals man is placed, and his destructive hand spares nothing that lives.

The passage which follows is more effective in French. It is a curious litany:

il tue pour se nourrir, il tue pour se vêtir, il tue pour se parer, il tue pour attaquer, il tue pour se défendre, il tue pour s'instruire, il tue pour s'amuser, il tue pour tuer: roi superbe et terrible, il a besoin de tout, et rien ne lui résiste . . . à l'agneau [il demande]

ses entrailles pour faire résonner une harpe . . . au loup sa dent la plus meurtrière pour polir les ouvrages légers de l'art, à l'éléphant ses défenses pour façonner le jouet d'un enfant: ses tables sont couvertes de cadavres . . . Cependant quel être [dans le carnage permanent] exterminera celui qui les extermine tous? Lui. C'est l'homme qui est chargé d'égorger l'homme . . . Ainsi s'accomplit . . . la grande loi de la destruction violente des êtres vivants. La terre entière, continuellement imbibée de sang, n'est qu'un autel immense où tout ce qui vit doit être immolé sans fin, sans mesure, sans relâche, jusqu'à la consommation des choses, jusqu'à l'extinction du mal, jusqu'à la mort de la mort.

Let me translate this:

Man kills to obtain food and kills to clothe himself. He kills to adorn himself and he kills in order to attack. He kills in order to defend himself and he kills in order to instruct himself. He kills to amuse himself and he kills in order to kill. Proud and terrible king, he wants everything and nothing can resist him . . . From the lamb he demands its guts to make his harp resound . . . from the wolf his deadliest tooth to polish his trifling works of art, from the elephant his tusks to make a toy for his child: his tables he covers with corpses . . . But who [in the general carnage] will exterminate the one who exterminates all the others? He will himself. It is man who is charged with the slaughter of men . . . Thus is accomplished . . . the great law of the violent destruction of living creatures. The whole earth, perpetually steeped in blood, is nothing but a vast altar, upon which all that is living must be sacrificed without end, without measure, without pause, until the consummation of things, until evil is extinct, until the death of death.⁹

And yet, says Maistre, man is born to love. He is tender and gentle and good. Whence comes his divine fury? Is it the earth calling for blood? Why is it, asks Maistre, that troops in battle never, or very seldom, mutiny against the instructions of their commanders, who tell them to exterminate other innocent men? Is there not something paradoxical in the fact that soldiers – innocent, honourable men, whom we receive with the greatest courtesy in private life, and who in ordinary life are gentle, virtuous, God-fearing, polite persons, who

⁹ References for quotations from Maistre are by volume and page to *Oeuvres complètes de J. de Maistre*, 14 vols. (Lyon, 1884–7), thus: v, 22–5, the reference for this quotation.