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Martin S. Staum. *Minerva's Message: Stabilizing the French Revolution.* Montreal and Buffalo, N.Y.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. xii + 342 pp. $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-1442-3.

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Martin Staum's *Minerva's Message* is the culmination of many years of scholarly endeavour studying the French National Institute and in particular its Class of Moral and Political Sciences, established during the French Revolution to replace the academies of the Ancien Regime. While some of Staum's findings had been published in scholarly journals over the years since 1980 (according to the acknowledgements in the preface, material from eight out of the twelve chapters had appeared in other forms), it is still extremely useful to have this knowledgeable, balanced, and comprehensive treatment of the Institute.

Staum's overall thesis is that although the Class of Moral and Political Sciences (CMPS) was intended to institutionalize the critical social and political culture of the Enlightenment, in the circumstances of the years following its establishment in 1795, it served in fact as a means of ending revolutionary turmoil and strengthening social order. In making his case, Staum traces the history of the Institute, describes the membership and activities of the CMPS, and provides a helpful overview of French intellectual life during this nascent period of the social sciences.

The Institute's mission, as prescribed in the law of 25 October 1795 that established it, was to conduct research, publish discoveries, correspond with other learned societies, and advise the Directory (i.e., the French government) about "scientific and literary works of general utility and promoting the glory of the Republic" (p. 4). Staum argues that both the CMPS and the government were very conscious of the need to stabilize revolutionary turmoil. Within the Class of Moral and Political Sciences, there was a vocal minority of *Ideologue* philosophers who had an ambitious vision of using social science to promote social harmony. They hoped to tame passions by reason, or re-channel them to socially acceptable goals. The means they envisioned included refining language to eliminate controversy, countering the effects of climate by appropriate legislation, and using the lessons of history to form citizens for intelligent participation in government. Balancing this technocratic tendency was a genuine commitment to guaranteeing human rights. It was *Ideologue* opposition to Napoleon Bonaparte's disregard for civil liberties and their opposition to the Concordat re-establishing the Catholic church which led the government to abolish the entire CMPS in January 1803.

Perhaps because of their opposition to Bonaparte, perhaps because they were the most vocal exponents of Enlightenment traditions in this period, the *Ideologues* have attracted the most scholarly attention among the members of the Institute. Staum, however, contends that the majority of the members of the CMPS, let alone the Institute, were indifferent or hostile to the *Ideologue* project of constructing human sciences on the model of the natural sciences. He concludes, from a detailed study of the membership of the Class, and from a careful analysis of the activities of *Ideologues* within the Class (including their role in sponsoring and framing essay prize competitions during these years), that *Ideologue* control, and even influence, was always quite limited.

Staum's second major theme is that although the self-image of the men of the Revolution (including those who established the Directory and its institutions) was that they were creating a new political and cultural world, there were is fact many continuities in both practice and discourse between the academies of the Ancien Regime and the Institute. From the early seventeenth century the French crown had funded academies as a way of encouraging the arts and sciences and enhancing its own prestige. During the last decades before the Revolution, permeated by Enlightenment influences, Parisian and provincial academies became places where nobles, clergymen, wealthy office-holders, lawyers, physicians, and other members of the upper bourgeoisie discussed moral, political, and social issues. Academies sponsored essay contests on practical subjects such as hygiene, poverty, education, and legal reform. If the academies can be por-

trayed as preparing revolutionary reforms and encouraging independent judgment, they nevertheless remained very embedded in the Ancien Regime culture of precedence and privilege. Even provincial academies solicited royal charters, honoured the monarchy on ceremonial occasions, and admitted local nobles as honourary members. After 1789, though they made some efforts to reform their rules, the academies were unable to escape the image of royal patronage and corporate identity. By 1793, all the Parisian academies had been abolished as aristocratic anachronisms.

When the Institute, with its First Class of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, its Second Class of Moral and Political Sciences, and its Third Class of Literature and Fine Arts, was inaugurated at its first public session in April 1796, spokesmen for both the government and the Institute proclaimed a new relationship between the state and learning in a world in which, in modern terminology, "intellectuals would be truly free under a free government" (p. 13). It soon became clear, however, that the Directory expected the Institute to promote social and political stability, the war effort, agricultural productivity, and commerce. Nor was the government really ready to allow unrestricted criticism of its political and social policies. As early as the anti-royalist coup of Fructidor (of September 1797), a member of the Second Class was purged by the Directors for political reasons. Bonaparte, while able to appreciate and celebrate the scientific contributions of its members, rejected the notion that the Institute serve as a forum for critical thinking, and, once in power, he suppressed the Class of Moral and Political Sciences.

So the ambivalent relationship with the French state was one of continuity between the old academies and the Institute. A further continuity, as Staum demonstrates, appears in the membership of the Institute, where the patterns of social origins and careers remained quite similar to the old academies. The percentage of members of clerical and noble background were somewhat lower in the CMPS than in the old academies, but not dramatically so. As in the literary academies of the Ancien Regime, scholars and men of letters, leavened by professional and official notables, were usually of non-entrepreneurial bourgeois origin. Staum's analysis of the career patterns of members of the Second Class shows that thirty-six percent of the Class had achieved renown before the Revolution, with the Institute, in effect, sanctioning existing prestige. Even with respect to political opinions, there was no sharp break with the past. Rather, as Staum describes the situation, the Second Class "was a short-lived union of older more established, more conservative or apolitical men in traditional disciplines such as history and geography, with more pro-Revolutionary (though far from politically radical) men in the innovative social sciences" (pp. 48-9).

There was continuity as well, Staum suggests, in discourse. For various complicated reasons, in part political, in part having to do with what audiences expected from the public sessions of the Institute, the original vision of the Institute's founders of promoting the Encyclopedist ideal of the unity of knowledge gradually shifted to an emphasis on eloquence, which was characteristic of the literary culture of the Ancien Regime. Poetry proved more popular and less sensitive politically than *Ideologue* dissertations on the origins and nature of knowledge.

The third major focus of Staum's work is a thoughtful examination of the development of the social sciences during this period. Arguing that a striking difference between our own era and the eighteenth century is in "the feeling of emancipation that was then attached to the formulation of the human sciences" (p. 14), Staum shows how changing social and political assumptions in the post-Terror years affected the fundamental notions that the Institute thinkers held about the nature and scope of the social sciences. He suggests that part of the current interest in these thinkers was their willingness to grapple with dilemmas still plaguing the social sciences. Like many "experts" today, "tainted by the power-bound implications of all knowledge and tempted by the political power to which some felt so close…[members of the Institute] vacillated between maintaining critical autonomy and giving advice to governments, between being technocrats and being defenders of individual freedom" (p. 18). It is from this critical perspective that Staum, in the latter chapters of his book, traces, in detail, how Institute thinkers wrestled with issues in what would become the field of psychology. Institute members also grappled, *inter alia*, with questions of moral education, the nature and purpose of history as a science, competition between utility and rights as the foundation for political institutions, and the progress of a science of political economy intended to achieve a better understanding of an evolving commercial society.

Staum's volume is quite complete, with well-chosen illustrations of some the personalities involved, six appendices providing statistical and factual details about Institute members and their activities, fifty pages of end notes, a thirty-page bibliography, and a helpful index. As usual with McGill-Queen's University Press, the book is well edited and handsomely produced. One fault this reviewer found was a blind reference to "the ill-fated Per-

rault proposal" (p. 34), which is not explained. In summary, this is a thoroughly researched, well-organized, and clearly written study that can be recommended to anyone interested in the intellectual and institutional history of the French Revolution.

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