

## **‘HISTORICISING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC: THE CASE OF ERNEST LAVISSE’**

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Isabel DiVanna is College Lecturer at Clare College, Cambridge. She holds two doctorates, one from the University of Manchester and one from the University of Cambridge, and was previously Junior Research Fellow at Wolfson College, where she will be returning in September. Her research investigates intellectual exchanges between France and Brazil in the 19th century, particularly in reference to the uses of Comtean positivism in Brazil. She has primarily focused on French intellectual history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and on the development of French academia and historical studies. Interested in the development of a philosophy of history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dr DiVanna has focused especially on forms of positivism, but is also researching other historically-minded theories which are not just philosophical, but often more broadly political, economic and social in nature.

### **Introduction to the Paper**

French academic and intellectual history in the nineteenth century has been a field characterized by two approaches. The first, put forward by historians, has sought to link the development of ideas of freedom and equality in French republicanism to the rise of academic studies (especially human sciences) in mid to late 19th century France. Historians who have endeavored to understand the relationship between republicanism and the rise of history as an academic discipline (the scientific rigor it demanded, the concern for certain periods of history and for certain types of sources and facts) have often associated the rise of history in French academia with the rise of a group of Protestant, republican historians in the Parisian milieu. A second strand of scholars who have investigated the development of French academia has focused on the “ancillary sciences” (philology, linguistics, literary criticism) and have mostly approached the subject from mono-disciplinary viewpoints to understand the history of their own disciplines. What this paper does, using Ernest Lavisse as a case study, is reassess the role of politics in the development of historical studies in France, to show that far from being guided by political

inclinations, historical studies were, in late 19th century France as they are today, motivated by a myriad of considerations which do not necessarily derive from political attitudes, but rather come hand in hand with them. By looking at Lavissee's considerations about the French Revolution in two sets of source-materials – scholarly books and text-books for school children - the paper pushes forward the debate about what is intellectual history now, and the role of philosophy of history in understanding the development of national narratives.

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