BRYAN D. PALMER RESPONDS:

My review of Dominic LaCapra’s *History in Transit* identified “a prolific writer who has seldom met a critic, however innocuous, that did not goad him to reply” (438). LaCapra seems to confirm this observation, lashing out at a review that was, by any reasonable standard of assessment, balanced and fair-minded. In the 700 words allocated by the *AHR*, I wrote three paragraphs of unambiguous praise, two of critical engagement, and a concluding passage that was mixed, but not without reference to the positive contribution of LaCapra’s text.

LaCapra commences his rejoinder with a subtle red-baiting reference to a book I published fifteen years ago, *Descent into Discourse*. Content that he has pigeonholed me, he finds my review predictable. Yet my commentary actually moved well past any template of opposition that might be construed from a skewed reading of *Descent*, contained no barbs, and was anything but polemical. The larger misreading is certainly LaCapra’s.

In responding to my review, LaCapra repeatedly calls on other authorities, rather than accepting responsibility for what he wrote in the book under review. He asks readers to consult the pages of another journal, *Rethinking History*, directing them to an essay he has written on intellectual history (which, incidentally, is largely about himself, fifteen of the approximately fifty references cited being his own works) and a sympathetic review of *History in Transit* that he hails as more comprehensive (given almost three times the space the *AHR* allows for all standard reviews).

I am accused of misreadings. This is always possible, especially when authors are not themselves as clear as they might be. LaCapra ends his book referring to theory not being reduced to “grubbing” in the archives (270). Upon reflection and rereading, I may indeed have overstated an opposition in LaCapra’s text, and for this I offer my regrets.

But LaCapra himself is not blameless. The use of the term “grubbing,” in relation to archival work, was an oddly provocative metaphor to employ in closing his book. Placing a term within single quotation marks can signify a variety of things, and in this case, with no reference of any kind offered, the meaning was certainly ambiguous. Noting now that he has borrowed the term “grubbing” from Robert Darnton is, surely, a rather odd admission from an intellectual historian concerned with language who has failed to acknowledge he has used a particular term. Finally, if borrowing was indeed from Darnton’s *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, 1982), where intellectual historians are urged to undertake “digging downward... grubbing in the archives instead of contemplating philosophical treatises” (1), this seems to call out for engagement/clarification (and, again, explicit citation) from LaCapra, whose text contains nothing like the archival work characterizing Darnton’s historical practice. In any case, I was reviewing what was on the page of *History in Transit*, not what LaCapra decides, upon prodding, to tell us should have been there.

In LaCapra’s refusal to acknowledge what he wrote about Russell Jacoby, there is again an insistence that reviewers should read texts other than the book under review. We are directed to past essays and quotes in the *AHR*, but this is, yet again, beside the point. LaCapra claims that I “rashly generalize” concerning his *History in Transit* views of Jacoby. This is not true. The words are LaCapra’s: “Russell Jacoby has been lambasting academic intellectuals and excoriating theoretical orientations in a manner that at times runs together neoconservatism and seeming leftist—a strange intellectual phantasmagoria in which Theodor Adorno becomes the specular image of Leo Strauss. The antitheoretical, left-right convergence is especially evident in the collection (including an essay by Jacoby) edited by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn” (250). This statement is indeed rash in its generalization, extreme in its rhetoric, and unsupported, as I pointed out in my review, by adequate citation. It was not misread. I merely called LaCapra on his indiscriminate and ideological typecasting of another scholar. He wants to wiggle off a hook of his own making by further typecasting me.

Authors, fortunately, do not write their own reviews. LaCapra should have been content with my praise, pondered my criticism. A thin skin is unbecoming in such a productively combative scholar.

BRYAN D. PALMER
Trent University

TO THE EDITORS:

I want to thank Andrew Zimmerman for acknowledging in his review (AHR, April 2005, 566–567) that my book *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* contains “very good historical research,” even though he criticizes some aspects of my work. When he accuses me of “sleight of hand” and distortion, however, Zimmerman indulges in his own distortion, especially in the climax of the review, where he states: “In Weikart’s account, however, Bryan emerges only as an opponent of German militarism. In this distortion of the 1925 Scopes ‘monkey’ trial, repeated twice in the book (1, 163), Weikart’s political sleight of hand appears most clearly. The text seeks to lead readers from opposing Hitler to supporting the theocratic agenda of Bryan and more recent figures in the United States. There are thus good political reasons for setting up the book as a contest between Hitler and Bryan, although these do not make for very persuasive history.”

Here Zimmerman is practicing his own “sleight of hand.” It should be obvious why I discuss Bryan only in the context of German militarism. My book is about Darwinian thought in Germany, as the title indicates, and therefore Bryan is a peripheral figure. He is mentioned in only eleven sentences of my book, mostly in the
chapter on Darwinian militarism. In two of these sentences I criticize Bryan’s position on the Darwinian roots of World War I. Thus it escapes me what the “good political reasons” are for seeing my book as a contest between Hitler and Bryan. Also, how could I have distorted the Scopes trial when I don’t even mention it anywhere in my book? Even more bizarre is Weikart’s absurd claim that my book supports a “theocratic agenda,” when he knows nothing about my political views. He would undoubtedly be astonished if he only knew.

Again, I thank Zimmerman, whom I respect as a fine scholar, for admitting that “Weikart admirably demonstrates the influence of Darwinism on Nazi racism and genocide,” and for acknowledging the value of my research. However, the credibility of his criticisms of my book is undermined by his wildly wrong claim that I support a “theocratic agenda.”

RICHARD WEIKART
California State University, Stanislaus

ANDREW ZIMMERMAN RESPONDS:

In my review I argued that Richard Weikart’s book, for all its fine research, distorts the history of Darwinism and anti-Darwinism in Germany in ways that reflect theocratic agendas in present-day American politics. By theocratic agendas I mean attempts to trump considerations of individual liberty with religious dogma in areas including reproduction, sexuality, and end-of-life decisions. These areas are among those mentioned by Weikart in his own text, even though they were at most peripheral to debates about Darwinism in Imperial Germany. From Darwin to Hitler is structured around a contest between Darwinism and Christian ethics, which Weikart characterizes as a contest between proponents of death and life, respectively. This representation is anachronistic, projecting present-day theocratic agendas onto the history of science in Imperial Germany. It also tendentiously simplifies both Darwinism and Christianity. I pointed to Professor Weikart’s failure to mention the Scopes monkey trial in his prominent and approving citations of William Jennings Bryan not as a “climax” to my review, but rather as a dog that did not bark in the night: it signaled, but did not in itself constitute, significant and systematic weaknesses in the book, weaknesses that I discussed and documented in my review.

ANDREW ZIMMERMAN
George Washington University

TO THE EDITORS:

In his review of my book Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers (AHR, April 2005, 588–589), Jeffrey Brooks suggests that I appropriated his work (the book Thank You, Comrade Stalin and earlier articles) without attribution. This suggestion is baseless, as anyone who reads through his and my published work on the Soviet press can discover for themselves.

In specific references I cite Professor Brooks’s influence on my definition of the “voices” of the Soviet press (23, 25), his production of culture approach to the study of prerevolutionary Russian literature (3), his demonstration that activists used the press to learn official Soviet language (72), his work on the disappearance of Soviet studies of the reader around 1930 (2, 34), his exploration of the negative attitudes of prerevolutionary Russian intellectuals to commercial culture (35, 213), his article on the decline in the circulation of books and newspapers in the USSR in the Civil War and NEP years (16, 46), and his discussion of the creation of a Stalinist “hyperreality” in the Soviet press and literature post-1929 (166). In addition, I cite most of Brooks’s published work on the Soviet press in an early footnote, as he notes in his review.

In his review, Brooks focuses on the fact that both of our books discuss a narrowing of the target audience(s) of Soviet newspapers to party activists/“insiders” during the First Five Year Plan. Brooks appears to indicate that I took this idea from him. First, I formulated this thesis in a seminar paper written for Professor Sheila Fitzpatrick in the winter of 1992–1993, before Professor Brooks had published it anywhere, as far as I know. I expanded on the thesis in my dissertation, which was complete and available to the public as of December 1997. I presented the thesis on the retargeting of the Soviet press (as well as the other core arguments of Closer to the Masses) in my short 1998 monograph Agitation, Propaganda, and the “Stalinization” of the Soviet Press, 1922–1930, published in the University of Pittsburgh’s Carl Beck Papers series two years before Brooks’s book appeared. Yet Brooks’s book does not cite either my monograph or my dissertation.

Second, Brooks mentions the narrowing of the newspaper audience in passing, and in general terms. In contrast, this phenomenon is at the center of my book. The book demonstrates that by 1930 the formerly “highbrow” Pravda and Izvestiia had come to resemble closely the “mass newspapers” Peasant Gazette and Worker Gazette, not just in language and layout, but in distribution methods and journalistic work procedures. I link this change to specific decisions of party leaders, to chronic production problems faced by early Soviet journalists, and to difficulties in distributing the newspapers. Professor Brooks does not do any of this, which is fine. His is a different book, focused more on newspaper content than on newspaper production.

I also note that our books differ greatly in source bases and use of theoretical literature. At the core of Brooks’s book is his comprehensive reading of several Soviet newspapers from the 1920s through the end of the Stalin era. My Closer to the Masses is based in part, of course, on the newspapers themselves, but also on Soviet archives, literary journals, and the trade publi-