

Revolution and the Republic

*A History of Political Thought in France
since the Eighteenth Century*

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Introduction

Revolution and the Republic

I

When, in January 1789, Louis XVI summoned the Estates-General to meet in Versailles he could little have imagined that, less than three years later, the monarchy itself would be overthrown and that, soon afterwards, he would be executed in the Place de la Révolution. In that short period of time, the feudal order had been destroyed, the aristocracy had been abolished, the Catholic Church had been deprived of both its property and its independence, and, no less significantly, the Republic had been proclaimed on 22 September 1792. ‘Nobody’, William Doyle has written, ‘could have predicted that things would work out as they did.’¹

What occurred during the French Revolution is central to the argument of this book.² Our starting point is that these tumultuous events marked the decisive moment in the history of modern France, even though, in an often repeated phrase, the Revolution was something of a mistake. What the revolutionaries of 1789 intended, in other words, was not what came out of the Revolution and this was so because at its heart was a process of *dérápape*.³ The Revolution was ‘blown off course’ by a series of factors, most notably economic mismanagement, divisions within the revolutionary elite, the flight of the king and his recapture at Varennes in June 1791, and, most importantly, the declaration of war against France’s neighbours in the following year. The Revolution thus deviated from the path envisaged by the members of the National Assembly in the summer of 1789. What many of its leaders appear to have wanted was a modernized monarchy and a reformed constitution based broadly upon the model of England and the separation of powers. This was swiftly rejected as the Revolution rushed headlong towards a fundamental reconstruction of society.

Unless otherwise stated the place of publication is Paris.

¹ William Doyle, *The Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1988), 213.

² Gary Kates (ed.), *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies* (London, 1998) and Robert Alexander, *Re-writing the French Revolutionary Tradition* (Cambridge, 2003).

³ François Furet and Denis Richet, *La Révolution française*, 2 vols. (1965–6).

Nothing quite like the French Revolution had been seen before.⁴ It was seen by its participants and by those who viewed it from afar as a revolution precisely because it sought to change all aspects of life. This included the calendar and currency; weights and measures; place and street names; the description of physical space and time; as well as public and religious festivals. 'While debating about clocks and hats', Lynn Hunt has written, 'the deputies were developing their notions about politics, representation and hierarchy.'⁵ The manner in which a person spoke or dressed came to be as politically significant as what they wrote or did. Far from being unimportant, this figured as part of the attempt to create a 'new man'.⁶ The end pursued came to transcend that of mere constitutional reform and became that of the creation of a virtuous people. To refer again to Lynn Hunt: 'the social and economic changes brought about by the Revolution were not revolutionary. . . . In the realm of politics by contrast virtually everything changed.'⁷

We need not dwell upon the protracted debate about the origins of the Revolution.⁸ Recent accounts, far from emphasizing the mounting class conflict between nobility and bourgeoisie⁹ or the Revolution's social and economic causes, have located these origins in two unrelated phenomena: the bankruptcy of the French state following the financially ruinous involvement in the American War of Independence and the economic crisis of 1788 arising from the general harvest failure of that year. As François Furet explained with something of a rhetorical flourish:¹⁰ 'From 1787, the kingdom of France had been a society without a State.' Beyond the façade of monarchical authority, there lay only 'panic and disorder'. The Revolution simply took over an 'empty space', in the process filling the enormous vacuum created by the sudden and near-total collapse of the once-mighty Bourbon monarchy. Yet, and this is at the heart of so much that was to follow, 'the revolutionary consciousness, from 1789 on, was informed by the illusion of defeating a State that had already ceased to exist'. Out of this came 'the ideology of a radical break with the past' and with this arose 'a tremendous cultural drive for equality'.¹¹

⁴ For a more nuanced perspective see Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, 2007).

⁵ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), 79.

⁶ Mona Ozouf, *L'Homme régénéré: Essais sur la Révolution française* (1989), 116–57.

⁷ Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 221.

⁸ See Doyle, *Origins*, 7–40, and Peter R. Campbell (ed.), *The Origins of the French Revolution* (London, 2006).

⁹ See Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003). Maza's bold thesis is that 'the French bourgeois did not exist'.

¹⁰ See Furet, *La Révolution française* (2007). For a commentary on Furet's work, see Ran Halévi, 'L'Expérience du passé: François Furet dans l'atelier de l'histoire (2007) and Tony Judt, 'François Furet (1927–1997)', *New York Review of Books* (6 Nov. 2002), 41–2. As Furet expressed it in *Le Monde* published on 19 May 1992: 'What continues to astonish me in retrospect is that in an event that was so dominantly and so extraordinarily political, people for so long wanted to see either social transformation or the emergence of capitalism.'

¹¹ Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1981), 24–5.

There are various dimensions to this account. One, drawing upon the work of Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret,¹² suggests that the nobility were not the reactionary and closed caste they were so often taken to be. 'In cultural development and in the political and social thought of the Enlightenment', Chaussinand-Nogaret wrote, 'nobles played a role as important as the representatives of the Third Estate.' Moreover, from the 1760s onwards, the nobility took on the idea of merit and showed themselves as eager as, if not more than, the bourgeoisie to take advantage of the new commercial opportunities afforded by the market.¹³ Through marriage the differences between nobility and middle classes were becoming increasingly blurred, even though this process was not occurring as quickly as the latter might have wished. This in turn produced a political programme that would be advanced by the aristocratic representatives of the National Assembly. 'Despotism, favouritism, intrigue, irresponsibility, waste', Chaussinand-Nogaret wrote, 'these were the governmental vices that the nobility sought to reform'. In broad terms, this meant constitutional government, an end to privilege and equality before the law.

What went wrong? At a minimum: two things. First, in the summer of 1789 the nobility jumped both ways. One group, sheltered (in Chaussinand-Nogaret's phrase) from 'the contaminations of the age', opposed innovation: the other 'welcomed the boldest reforms'. Second, and more seriously, the nobility 'became the victims of their own line of thought'. By questioning the authority of their right to hereditary power they irretrievably undermined their own legitimacy. This argument finds support in more recent work by William Doyle. Prior to the Revolution, Doyle contends, the French nobility were 'the most open elite in Europe'; but during the Revolution itself, he suggests, they proved to be their own 'most fateful' enemies.¹⁴

A related part of this argument focuses upon the emergence of the ideology and rhetoric of anti-nobility. Here we can draw upon the thesis advanced by Patrice Higonnet.¹⁵ Recognizing that 'the distance between most nobles and most bourgeois was not great in 1789', Higonnet nevertheless contends that there existed differences, if not of substance, then of style, and that these fed powerfully into perceptions of what existed, thus distorting the 'supposed realities of the situation'. To that extent, Higonnet rightly states, 'the actions of the nobles had little to do with their fate'. Rather, what mattered was the evolution of the attitude of the bourgeoisie towards the nobility. This passed through various stages. Armed with

¹² Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *La Noblesse au XVIIIe siècle: De la féodalité aux lumières* (1976).

¹³ See also Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 418. Of the debate concerning the so-called 'commercial nobility' Roche writes: 'The controversy reveals a society in which the highest levels of the bourgeoisie and the highest levels of the aristocracy tended, in terms of economic practice and social relations, to break the legal framework of orders and classes in such a way as to form a single existential group that can be seen as the predecessor of the notables in nineteenth-century bourgeois society. At the same time, however, a substantial segment of the society was unwilling to give up existing privileges.'

¹⁴ William Doyle, *Aristocracy and its Enemies in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford, 2009). See also Jay M. Smith, *Nobility Reimagined: The Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY, 2005).

¹⁵ Patrice Higonnet, *Class, Ideology and the Rights of Nobles during the French Revolution* (Oxford: 1981).

the ‘hopelessly unrealistic’ expectation that ‘the gift of citizenship would transform potentially selfish individuals and make them good’, the view in 1789 was that, if the nobility was to be abolished, then the nobles themselves could be transformed (as, indeed, some of them set out to demonstrate). After 1791, in an atmosphere of what Higonnet describes as ‘opportunistic anti-nobilism’, the nobility were increasingly seen as being both corrupt and treacherous, and therefore to be excluded from the nation. Next came the ‘ideological anti-nobilism’ of the Jacobins. It was at this point that the physical eradication of the nobility through the Terror became ‘the symbolic representation of social regeneration’. ‘Only in 1799’, Higonnet concludes, ‘did the bourgeoisie finally understand that all property owners should make common cause’. Again this argument receives support from Doyle. ‘The less threatening nobles became’, he writes, ‘the more ferociously they were threatened.’¹⁶

To that extent the bourgeoisie, contrary to what for many years was the prevailing Marxist account of the Revolution, actually acted against their own economic interests, allying themselves with the urban poor and the peasantry in defence of what Higonnet terms an ‘abhorrent economic and social levelling’. Why was this so? As Furet pointed out, as early as August 1789 the leaders of the Revolution began to believe that it was time to ‘stop’ the Revolution, but ‘each of these successive rallyingings took place only after its leaders had taken the Revolution a step further in order to keep control of the mass movement and to discredit rival factions’. At each moment, in other words, those who wished to bring the Revolution to a close found themselves extending it in order to defeat their opponents. In consequence, the leaders of the Revolution came to embrace ever more radical positions and, with each new phase, the attachment to, first, constitutional monarchy and, then, constitutional government itself became ever weaker.

Here we arrive at the heart of the drama of the Revolution. How could a series of reforms which had set out to abolish privilege and to establish legal and civil liberty lead to a decade of bloody turmoil and produce a new form of revolutionary government?¹⁷ To find an answer to this conundrum we need to provide responses to three questions.

To begin: what, if any, was the connection between 1789, the Revolution that produced the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen*, and 1793, the Revolution that produced the Reign of Terror? As summarized by Patrice Gueniffey, there have been three answers to this question.¹⁸ The ‘counter-revolutionary’ answer, articulated first during the Revolution itself, saw 1793 as the ‘necessary outcome’ of 1789, as the moment which revealed its awful and bloody truth. The ‘revolutionary’ answer, given its clearest expression in the mid-nineteenth century, saw 1793 as an accident, as the product of civil war and foreign invasion, and therefore as having ‘no connection whatsoever with the principles of the Revolution’. The third answer is of more recent origin. This sees the Terror, 1793, as a ‘contingent’ product of ‘the

¹⁶ Doyle, *Aristocracy*, 309.

¹⁷ See Keith Michael Baker, ‘Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France’, *Journal of Modern History*, 73 (2001), 32–53.

¹⁸ Patrice Gueniffey, *La Politique de la Terreur* (2000), 199.

culture of the Revolution'. It was there in embryo in 1789 but needed the circumstances of foreign invasion and civil war to bring to the fore 'passions and ideas which were not easily compatible with the establishment of political liberty'.¹⁹ 'There were no revolutionary circumstances', Furet wrote, 'there was a Revolution that fed on circumstances'.²⁰

Second, what was the Terror?²¹ This is not easily answered as even the revolutionaries themselves were far from agreeing about what it was. At a minimum, however, it took three different forms. There was, first of all, the spontaneous and collective violence associated with the punitive (and usually savage) acts of the people directed against their opponents. Prison massacres and mob lynchings were two of its forms. This was violence with no particular aim but vengeance. It both preceded and post-dated the Revolution and was not specific to it. Jean-Paul Marat, from the moment he published the first issue of *L'Ami du peuple* on 12 September 1789, was its most tireless advocate. As Gueniffey indicates, Marat's view was that the enemies of the Revolution should be stoned to death, stabbed, shot, hanged, burnt, impaled, or torn to pieces. Next there was Terror as the calculated, premeditated, rational, and strategic use of violence as an instrument and as a means designed to develop what might be termed a logic of example. The execution of Louis XVI would fall into this category. The aim was to terrorize the 'enemies' of the Revolution into silence. There was, next, Terror as extermination, the use of violence to eradicate the enemies of people through their systematic execution. It was not a question of punishment but of annihilation. The ultimate symbol of this last stage was *la Sainte Guillotine*, an instrument of execution capable of beheading the twenty-two leaders of the Girondin faction (one of whom was already dead) in twenty-five minutes.²² In terms of chronology, the Revolution went from the first form of Terror to the third, the definition of the Revolution's enemies being gradually extended to include ever greater numbers of people. The actual figures involved were relatively small, with approximately 16,000 people being guillotined in a nine-month period covering 1793–4. However, these increased dramatically with the war against the Revolution's opponents in the Vendée and the Revolution's felt need to come up with more inventive and thorough means to dispatch its opponents.²³

Let us look at two examples of how the Terror worked. The first is the famous 'Law of Suspects' passed on 17 September 1793, eleven days after the Convention declared that Terror was 'the order of the day'. This piece of legislation empowered the State to arrest anyone who 'either by their conduct, their contacts, their words or their writings, showed themselves to be supporters of tyranny, federalism or the enemies of the people'. This included those who could have been said to have either 'misled' or 'discouraged' the people. Virtually anybody could have fallen foul of

¹⁹ Furet, quoted *ibid.* 200.

²⁰ Furet, *Interpreting the Revolution*, 62.

²¹ See Gueniffey, *La Politique de la Terreur*.

²² See Daniel Arasse, *La Guillotine et l'imaginaire de la Terreur* (1987).

²³ Amongst the many attempts to secure a speedier process of execution were plans to build a guillotine capable of the simultaneous execution of several victims.

such a law, especially as the only evidence required to establish guilt was denunciation by a loyal patriot. The sole punishment for those found guilty was death.²⁴ The second example illustrates how Terror operated against groups or regions which opposed the Revolution. We will pass over the systematic massacre of the people of the Vendée in western France by the so-called *colonnes infernales* in January 1794 and mention only the fate of the city of Lyons after it had rallied to the cause of counter-Revolution. When it finally surrendered, the Committee of Public Safety decreed that the entire city was to be destroyed in an act of collective punishment, its very name was to disappear and was to be replaced by that of Ville-Affranchie. There was too much work for the guillotine to do, so condemned men were blown into open graves by cannon and gunfire.

The truth is that the Terror developed a logic of its own, threatening or punishing people not for what they did but for what they were or represented. This is why the category of 'suspect' was at its heart. Moreover, it was a 'system' that perpetuated itself. Its defenders liked to portray the Terror as a temporary measure designed to meet exceptional circumstances. However, once installed, it operated not just as a system of arbitrary and absolute power but as something that could not be stopped or even slowed down. Rather the pace of its operation accelerated, in the end engulfing most of the revolutionaries themselves, including Robespierre, his own crime being the 'suspicion' or 'rumour' that he intended to marry the daughter of Louis XVI and have himself crowned as king.

The third question is: who were the Jacobins? It would be a mistake to see the Jacobins as a single homogeneous bloc or party. Initially they took the title of the Société des Amis de la Constitution, later becoming the Société des Amis de la Liberté et de l'Égalité. Members of this society were so called for the reason that they originally met in a former convent of Dominican or 'Jacobin' monks. Whilst its leadership was concentrated in Paris, with Robespierre and those who later constituted the Committee of Public Safety at its heart, there also existed a network of provincial clubs which, at their height, brought together between 100,000 and 200,000 activists who saw their task as that of supporting and implementing the policies of the new regime. Initially the Jacobins were not clearly distinguishable from the other groups that aspired to lead the Revolution, but by 1793 they had distanced themselves from the moderates, such that the Terror of 1793–4 was very much their affair. Not only did the Jacobins implement it but they also provided its political and moral justification.

It is the question of what the Jacobins stood for (and, more generally, what was their significance) that has generated the most controversy. As Patrice Gueniffey has observed: 'through their capacity to embody what was most radical in the French Revolution, and consequently to embody the Revolution itself, the Jacobins passed into the two centuries which followed as legend, history, tradition, heritage, theory

²⁴ At first substantial numbers of suspects were acquitted but over time this number was dramatically reduced as a percentage of those placed on trial. See Gérard Walter, *Actes du Tribunal Révolutionnaire* (1986).

and practice'.²⁵ As for Robespierre himself,²⁶ as Furet remarked, he had 'the strange privilege of becoming an *embodiment*'. 'Robespierre', he wrote, 'is an immortal figure not because he reigned supreme over the Revolution for a few months, but because he was the mouthpiece of its purest and most tragic discourse.'²⁷

Above all, this was a discourse that assigned a new goal to the Revolution: that of attaining the reign of virtue and of bringing about a return to a natural, prelapsarian order.²⁸ 'Considering', Robespierre declared, 'the extent to which the human race has been degraded by the vice of our former social system, I am convinced of the need to bring about a complete regeneration . . . to create a new people.'²⁹ How did the Jacobins envision their model of virtue? At its core was a quest for simplicity and a rejection of what were seen as the imperfections, the shallowness, and false appearances of the corrupt present. Robespierre, who gloried in his mythical status as the 'Incorruptible', was its very incarnation. Immune from ordinary passions (there is no evidence that Robespierre engaged in any sexual activity),³⁰ he above all others was best placed to denounce the failings and prejudices of ordinary mortals. No one could better tear away the 'masks' behind which were hidden depravity, avarice, and ambition.

This can be illustrated by citing one example of Robespierre's rhetoric. Robespierre detested the theatre. He did so because, of all the arts, it more than any other was a world of appearance, and therefore was capable of corrupting an innocent people. 'The princesses of the theatre', Robespierre announced, 'are no better than the princesses of Austria. Both are equally depraved and both should be treated with equal severity.'³¹ Actors, and especially pretty actresses, were to be denied access to the ranks of the people. Moreover, Robespierre extended this argument to politics itself. In a remarkable tirade delivered before the Jacobins on 8 January 1794 Robespierre compared the opponents of the Revolution to actors, where the politically and morally corrupt followed each other in a succession of different 'masks'.³² 'It is always', Robespierre declared, 'the same scene, the same theatrical action'. Conversely, it was his sense of his own moral purity that provided the Jacobins with the audacity first to denounce and then to physically destroy their opponents, repeating with hypnotic regularity the denunciation of their moral turpitude and crimes. 'I sometimes fear', Robespierre announced shortly before

²⁵ Patrice Gueniffey, 'Jacobinisme', in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française: Idées* (1992), 243. See also Patrice Gueniffey, 'Robespierre', *ibid.*, *Acteurs*, 247–71.

²⁶ See Ruth Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (London, 2007).

²⁷ Furet, *Interpreting the Revolution*, 56, 61. For a selection of Robespierre's speeches in English: see Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Robespierre: Virtue and Terror* (London, 2007).

²⁸ See Lucien Jaume, *Le Discours Jacobin et la démocratie* (1989) and Mona Ozouf, "'Jacobin": Fortune et infortunes d'un mot', *L'École de la France: Essais sur la Révolution, l'utopie et l'enseignement* (1984), 74–90.

²⁹ *Cœuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, x. *Discours de 27 juillet 1793–27 juillet 1794* (1967), 12.

³⁰ Scurr, *Fatal Purity*, 102, indicates that upon his arrival in Paris Robespierre acquired a mistress. The evidence is not conclusive.

³¹ *Cœuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, x, 101.

³² See Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 2002).

his own fall from power, 'that in the eyes of posterity I will be sullied by the impure proximity of wicked men'.³³

The second point of reference for the Jacobin model of virtue was the classical world of Greece and Rome. Turning their backs on the Christian tradition, it was Solon, Lycurgus, and Brutus who were their heroes, with a clear preference being expressed for Sparta over Athens. As Robespierre's most loyal supporter, Saint-Just, was to remark, the world had been empty since the Romans. Here was fertile terrain for the florid imaginations of the revolutionaries, as they dwelt upon a world where there was no industry, no commerce, no luxury, no big cities, only the rustic simplicity of peasant farmers and the sublime heroism of citizen-soldiers. It was also an exclusively male world, public space being reserved only for the activities of men and for supposedly male virtues.

Most of all, it was a world which saw public participation in the communal affairs of the State as the source of moral worth. The good individual was the good citizen and the good citizen was the good patriot. Saint-Just summed this up when he said that the 'good citizen' was ardent, pure, austere, and disinterested. There, he proclaimed, was the 'character of a patriot'.³⁴ The common good was always to take precedence over the individual interest; the public realm was at all times to have priority over the private sphere. The Jacobins were unambiguous about this. 'A man who lacks public virtues', Robespierre announced, 'cannot have private virtues'.³⁵ Again, this had an overt political message. What, Robespierre asked, have the 'enemies' of the Revolution understood by virtue? 'By this word', he responded, 'they have all understood fidelity to certain private and domestic obligations; but they have never understood it in terms of public virtues, never as selfless devotion to the cause of the people'.³⁶

Accordingly, the moral regeneration of the individual—at times for Robespierre it was also a physical regeneration, achieved through the regimentation and control of a citizen's diet and clothing³⁷—could best be secured in a communal setting and it was this that explained the fascination of the Jacobins for civic festivals. Of these, the most portentous and imposing were the ceremonies constructed around the cult of the Supreme Being.³⁸ This new civic religion was to purge the individual of everything that was to distinguish him or her from the civic body. All divisions would disappear before the universal religion of nature.³⁹

How did this lead to the Terror? Everything indicates that the Jacobins believed that moral regeneration would be spontaneous and would be grounded upon the innate moral goodness of the people. Once the aristocratic prejudices and practices of the old order had been removed and once, most importantly, the people had

³³ *Œuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, x, 567.

³⁴ Quoted in Jaume, *Le Discours Jacobin*, 211.

³⁵ *Œuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, x, 520.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 531.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 15–20.

³⁸ See Mona Ozouf, *La Fête révolutionnaire, 1789–99* (1976).

³⁹ See 'Sur les Rapports des idées religieuses et morales avec les principes républicains, et sur les fêtes républicains', *Œuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, x, 443–62.

been placed in an appropriately beneficial educational environment, virtue would reign triumphant. Everyone could participate in this renewal, even the former noble and Catholic priest. Indeed, so embracing was this vision of universal fraternity and moral harmony that it could even welcome the foreigner.

However, real human beings, with their earthly passions, presented the Jacobins with something of a problem. Not everyone showed themselves prepared to be convinced by this vision of the sublime; opponents refused to go away; dissenting voices continued to be heard; well-intentioned measures for reform produced practical disasters. The only explanation could be the continued existence of selfishness and wickedness. So, with mounting intensity, the Jacobins deployed a rhetoric that contrasted 'virtue', 'truth', 'purity', and 'people' with that of 'vice', 'falsehood', 'corruption', and 'individuals'. There could be no compromise with such 'evil' and therefore death could be perceived as the rational alternative to a failure or absence of virtue.

Thus, the remorseless logic of extermination could begin. The corrupt, the traitors, the turncoats, the backsliders, the opportunists, the cowards, the moderates, the false revolutionaries, the immoral, those lacking in virtue, all could be removed. Robespierre's speeches are littered with such language, possibly his favourite derogatory expression being that of *fripou* or rascal. The world was full of such unworthy characters, all of them eager to subvert the government of the Republic. Yet each purification, each wave of executions, seemed only to leave France still divided between the pure and the wicked, necessitating renewed zeal. Category upon category of people became the objects of suspicion, up to and including the revolutionaries themselves, such that they started to slaughter one another, with Robespierre being obliged in each case to further radicalize the process, if only to keep his own head. So, little by little, there emerged an ideology of Terror, which not only justified its use but also identified its victims. Terror was to be an emanation of virtue and the guillotine was to be the means of separating the good from the wicked.⁴⁰

Its clearest definition came in Robespierre's speech before the Convention on 5 February 1794.⁴¹ 'Within the scheme of the French Revolution', Robespierre declared, 'that which is immoral is impolitic, that which is corrupting is counter-revolutionary.' If, he went on, 'the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue, amid revolution it is at one and the same time *virtue and terror*: virtue, without terror, is ill-fated; terror, without virtue, is impotent.' Terror, therefore, was 'nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice'. Slowness of judgement amounted to impunity, to punish oppressors was 'clemency' and to pardon them was a 'barbarity'. No one except the guilty had anything to fear but to tremble was itself a sign of guilt.⁴²

⁴⁰ Furet, *Interpreting the Revolution*, 69–70.

⁴¹ For key speeches by Robespierre, Saint-Just, and Couthon in support of the Terror see *L'Impossible Terreur* (1989).

⁴² *Œuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, x. 350–66.

What was needed for the guilty to be punished? Here Robespierre and his colleagues had no doubts: revolutionary government.⁴³ This, Robespierre acknowledged, was a concept that was ‘as new as the revolution that had produced it’. Its definition and description could not be found ‘in the books of writers on politics’, because they had not foreseen the Revolution. Yet, with astonishing prescience, Robespierre understood exactly what it was, and so made the all-important distinction between revolutionary and constitutional government. ‘The goal of constitutional government’, he clarified, ‘is to conserve the Republic; that of revolutionary government is to establish it. The Revolution is the war of liberty against its enemies; the Constitution is the regime of victorious and peaceful liberty.’ Under a constitutional government, it was sufficient to protect the individual from the abuses of public power; under a revolutionary government the public power was obliged to defend itself against all the factions that attacked it, ‘deploying without cease new and rapid means in response to new and pressing dangers’. Revolutionary government owed its citizens the full weight of its protection; towards its enemies it owed ‘only death’. Revolutionary government, in short, was government without limits, government in a vacuum, government as absolute power. It was, to cite Robespierre’s most famous phrase, ‘the despotism of liberty against tyranny’. Its goal was nothing less than ‘the salvation of the people’.⁴⁴

How could such a revolutionary government come to an end? This was possible only when all the enemies of the Revolution had been defeated. But this, as defined by the revolutionary project, was not a possibility. The alternative was the death of the revolutionaries themselves. ‘Is not’, Robespierre asked, ‘the death of the founders of the liberty itself a triumph?’ Only the ‘tomb’ would bring them ‘rest’. ‘I’, he announced, ‘do not believe in the necessity of life.’ On 30 July 1794 Robespierre, having first tried to kill himself, was granted his wish, leaving behind, as he said in his final speech, ‘only a terrible truth and death’.⁴⁵

The men who secured Robespierre’s dramatic removal from power and his execution had as their goal not only that of preserving their own lives but also that of terminating the Revolution. The Constitution of Year III, promulgated during the summer of 1795, sought to establish the Republic upon a secure and stable basis, limiting popular sovereignty, protecting individual liberties, and locating power in the hands of an educated elite.⁴⁶ First, however, France had to extract herself from the Terror, a task which entailed much more than the execution of Robespierre and his closest associates.⁴⁷ The administrative and organizational structure of the Terror had to be dismantled and those deemed responsible needed to be judged. This was an entirely new experience, and was not one to be accomplished either quickly or easily. Nor was the restoration of justice without its own acts of arbitrary

⁴³ ‘Rapport sur les Principes du gouvernement révolutionnaire fait au nom du Comité du Salut Public’, *ibid.* 273–7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 357.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 567.

⁴⁶ See Michel Troper, *Terminer la Révolution: La Constitution de 1795* (2006).

⁴⁷ Bronislaw Baczko, *Comment sortir de la Terreur: Thermidor et la Révolution* (1989). See also Sophie Wahnich, *Les Émotions, la Révolution française et le présent* (2009).

revenge. As Benjamin Constant was to observe shortly afterwards: ‘nothing is rarer than the passage from arbitrary power to the rule of law’.⁴⁸

But the Terror left an even more enduring problem. What sense could be made of it? How could it be explained? What had been the cause of its genesis? Did its original source lie in the people or in their leaders? How could its reappearance be prevented? There is an argument, recently advanced by Patrice Gueniffey, which sees the resort to Terror as the ‘fate’ not just of the French Revolution but of all revolutions. Seen as such, the use of Terror is integral to the logic of revolution itself, its employment intrinsic to a situation where power is used absolutely and without limits.⁴⁹ Gueniffey is probably correct and, it could be argued, it was precisely this truth that was perceived by Edmund Burke as early as 1790. But this was not an argument available to those who sought simultaneously to understand their own immediate past and to move France forward towards the establishment of a more enduring and less threatening regime.⁵⁰

No one better represented this endeavour than Benjamin Constant. In the uncertain years that followed the establishment of the Directory in 1795 he published a series of brilliant pamphlets designed to alert France to the need to break with what he termed her ‘revolutionary habits’. These habits included an enthusiasm for counter-revolution.⁵¹ Most persuasive of all was his text *Des effets de la Terreur*, published in May 1797. Here Constant set out to demolish all of the arguments which suggested that the Terror had been somehow either ‘inevitable’ or ‘beneficial’. It had not saved the Republic. It had not overcome the obstacles faced by the Revolution. It had not created a ‘new people’. It had not prepared France for a ‘free constitution’. Rather, Constant argued, it had destroyed the ‘public spirit’ of the people, prepared them for ‘servitude’, and produced the vicious circle of crime following crime. Worse still, the savage events that had accompanied the birth of the First Republic had led people ‘to conflate the Republic with the Terror, the republicans with their executioners’.⁵²

What then did the future hold? With his usual lucidity, Constant realized that there could be no return to the past. If people wanted rest, that rest ‘had to be found in the Republic’ because, if not, the alternative was ‘to recommence, in the opposite direction, the terrible path that France has taken and to return to tyranny by revisiting the river of blood which had flowed in the name of liberty’.⁵³ Like it or not, in other words, France’s future was inextricably linked with the republican form of government, in whatever shape that might be. Somehow or other, that

⁴⁸ Benjamin Constant, *Des Réactions politiques* (1797), 92.

⁴⁹ Gueniffey, *La Politique de la Terreur*, 226.

⁵⁰ See Andrew Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY, 2008).

⁵¹ In addition to *Des Réactions politiques*, see *De la Force du Gouvernement actuel de la France et de la nécessité de s’y rallier* (1796) and *Des Suites de la contre-révolution de 1660 en Angleterre* (1799).

⁵² Constant, *Des effets de la Terreur* (Lausanne, 1948), 45. The text was originally published in May 1797.

⁵³ Constant, *De la Force du Gouvernement actuel*, 109.

regime had to be built and consolidated. The choice, Constant averred, was a stark one: between ‘order and liberty on one side, anarchy and despotism on the other’.⁵⁴

Which path would France take? Constant himself feared the worst, correctly perceiving that, for many, the exercise of arbitrary power had not lost its attractions. Accordingly, the stark choice he set out for France was one that was to remain well beyond the final decade of the eighteenth century. Here perhaps we should again refer to Robespierre. The Revolution, in a very real sense, came to an end with his fall. The dream of recreating human beings and of rebuilding society from top to bottom was over. Yet, as Robespierre knew, even in death he was leaving behind a powerful legacy. In his final, passionate, and furious speech, denouncing enemy after enemy, he again called upon his fellow revolutionaries to draw upon all their resources of courage. For, if they did not, the consequences were clear. France, he told them, would suffer ‘a century of civil wars and of calamity’ and they, in turn, would perish. What followed was accurately to bear out this sombre prediction. It is that century of civil war and calamity that provides the political backdrop for the ideas examined in this volume.

II

If the dramatic course taken by the Revolution of 1789 could not have been foreseen, the same might perhaps not be said of the collapse of the social and political order that was soon to be known as the *ancien régime*. Successive attempts at financial and institutional reform—both half-hearted and genuine—had all come to nothing, a situation greatly exacerbated by the inertia of the kindly but irresolute Louis XVI. In the end the French monarchy ran out of both money and ideas. If few now take seriously the claim, beloved of Marxist historians such as Georges Lefebvre, that the decisive and determining cause of the French Revolution was the rise of the capitalist bourgeoisie,⁵⁵ it would equally be a mistake to believe that the Revolution was entirely without social origins. The actions of the peasantry and of the people of Paris in the summer of 1789 were proof alone of this. More interesting from our perspective, however, was the realm of public opinion. Never before had it been so powerful or (as the unfortunate Queen Marie-Antoinette was to discover) so fickle.

Here recent investigations into how people lived, worked, dressed, consumed, and spoke—*l’histoire des choses banales*⁵⁶—have successfully opened up the way for ground-breaking studies of the press, book-selling and readership, education, religious rituals, public festivals, and sexual habits. Thus, by moving away from the ‘great texts’ of the High Enlightenment towards the actual diffusion and vulgarization of books and pamphlets (including pornographic ones) of

⁵⁴ Constant, *De la Force du Gouvernement actuel*, 3.

⁵⁵ But see Henry Heller, *The Bourgeois Revolution in France, 1789–1815* (New York, 2006).

⁵⁶ Daniel Roche, *Histoire des choses banales* (1997).

eighteenth-century low life,⁵⁷ it became possible to provide an entirely novel account of the cultural origins of the French Revolution. They were to be found, as Roger Chartier has shown, in the de-Christianization of French society and the de-sacralization of the monarchy. By separating the person of the monarch from the divine, these long-term trends meant that the institution itself could be subject to ridicule and profanity.⁵⁸ Likewise, by looking at ‘perceptions and conceptions, customs and practices’ of the people, Daniel Roche in his *La France des Lumières* has revealed how the ‘popular representation’ of the monarchy came under severe strain—there was, he writes, ‘a demand for irreverence, transgression, and subversion’—leading ultimately to ‘a major symbolic crisis’ affecting ‘the organic structure of the Ancien Régime state’. The people, he continues, discovered the existence of a ‘void’ at the heart of the ‘principal royal functions’. Ultimately, Roche contends, the ‘divine right monarchy acknowledged its helplessness’, paving the way for a series of crises crystallized around two main areas of conflict: the need to solve the kingdom’s financial problems and the question of whether representation in the recalled Estates-General should take a traditional or new form. In the end, the decision was made to double the number of representatives from the Third Estate but to preserve voting by order. The polarizing consequences of this decision and of the elections that were to follow had a dramatic impact upon the course of events in the summer of 1789.

If attention has fallen upon the manner in which the Bourbon monarchy was stripped of its sacred aura, so too it has focused upon the producers of ideas themselves and, more broadly, the structural dimensions of intellectual life in France. Moreover, what these inquiries serve to reveal and to emphasize are the significant levels of continuity between the intellectual practices of pre- and post-revolutionary France. This also constitutes an important backdrop to the political ideas to be discussed in this volume.

As is well known, Jürgen Habermas has argued that intellectuals were the representatives of an emergent public sphere.⁵⁹ As the eighteenth century evolved, French *philosophes* in the *salons*, German philosophers in reading societies, and English writers in coffee houses came together in a social space in order to participate, as independent thinkers, in the open discussion of matters of cultural and political interest. The French case is especially intriguing. In the seventeenth century everything was done to bring a rising republic of letters under royal patronage, principally through such institutions as the Académie Française and the Académie des Sciences. Similar, if less powerful and prestigious, institutions were created in the provinces.

⁵⁷ See Robert Darnton, ‘The High Enlightenment and Low-Life Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France’, *Past and Present*, 51 (1971), 81–115. See also Simon Burrows, *A King’s Ransom: The Life of Charles Théveneau de Morande, Blackmailer, Scandalmonger and Master-Spy* (London, 2010).

⁵⁸ See Roger Chartier, *Les Origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1991). Chartier’s argument is that the 18th cent. saw the emergence of a new way of reading texts, less based on authority and religion, and more ‘free, casual and critical’ in character.

⁵⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989). See also Didier Masseau, *L’Invention de l’intellectuel dans l’Europe du XVIIIe siècle* (1994).

Freed from the vagaries of aristocratic benefaction, men of letters nevertheless found themselves compromised, implicated in the broader project of absolutist state-building and the greater glory of the monarchy.⁶⁰ In 1662 a report presented to Louis XIV on the use of the arts ‘for preserving the splendour of the king’s enterprises’ listed ninety men of letters and their aptitudes to serve the monarch. This advice was duly followed and from 1663 onwards sizeable pensions were awarded to writers and scholars. Particular attention was given to historians, with the appointment of *historiographes royal*. Over a century later, in 1774, the Baron de Breuteuil, future first minister of Louis XVI, wrote a memorandum exploring the question of ‘how to make use of men of letters’, a text that, according to Munro Price, ‘argued that the monarchy should stop treating writers as enemies, as Louis XV had done in his last years, and instead make friends of them through patronage’.⁶¹

As both Daniel Roche and Dena Goodman have observed,⁶² the *salons* of eighteenth-century Paris played a key role in reducing this degree of dependency upon the State. Here conversation and discussion reigned supreme, and did so in an atmosphere that became ever less frivolous and ever more preoccupied with the advance of knowledge. Under the governance of their often-competing female hosts, the *salons* brought together people of diverse social backgrounds and nationalities, but at their heart were the *philosophes*.

‘Without being fully conscious of it’, writes Pierre Lepape, the *philosophes* ‘formed a new social group characterized by their unfettered use of knowledge and by their demand for complete liberty of expression, a dispersed community united at the level of ideas by the same creed of the search for truth by means of reason and experimentation.’⁶³ It was Voltaire—in the three entries in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764) devoted to ‘Philosophes’, ‘Gens de Lettres’ and ‘Lettres, Gens de lettres, ou lettrés’—who first provided their collective self-portrait and who, in his famous defence of Calas, gave form to a new type of political engagement. Having no power but in his words and pen, he attacked arbitrary power and the miscarriage of justice in the name of humanity and praised what he termed ‘independence of mind’.⁶⁴ The transformation that occurred over the century was accurately summarized (and criticized) in 1805 by Louis de Bonald, one of the most articulate voices of Catholic reaction. Asked to comment on the influence of *gens de lettres*, he replied: ‘If, in the century of Louis XIV, the Académie Française had proposed a similar subject for discussion, it would have spoken of the *duties* of *gens de lettres*. Today it is a question of their *independence*.’⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See Daniel Roche, *Les Républicains des lettres: Gens de culture et Lumières au XVIII^e siècle* (1988), 151–71 and Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 49–59.

⁶¹ *The Fall of the French Monarchy* (London, 2003), 50.

⁶² Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, 443; Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), 12–52. See also Antoine Lilti, *Le Monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (2005). Lilti’s account emphasizes the aristocratic practices of sociability typical of the *salons* and downplays the role of radical ideas.

⁶³ Pierre Lepape, *Voltaire Le Conquérant: Naissance des intellectuels au siècle des Lumières* (1994), 269.

⁶⁴ Opponents were far less charitable: see Joseph de Maistre, *Œuvres* (2007), 557.

⁶⁵ Louis de Bonald, ‘Réflexions sur les questions de l’indépendance des gens de lettres, et de l’influence du théâtre sur les mœurs et le goût, proposées pour le sujet de prix par l’institut national, à sa séance de 29 juin 1805’, in *Œuvres complètes*, x (1838; repr. Geneva, 1982), 58.

Here was a model that was to be replicated endlessly in future years, the man of letters raised to the status of what Paul Bénichou referred to as 'a secular spiritual power'.⁶⁶ Ironically, the enemies of the *philosophes* were obliged to adopt similar strategies and techniques.⁶⁷

Central to the appearance of this new social category was the influence of a market economy that undermined traditional commercial and social relations. It was in this context that the great nineteenth-century critic Sainte-Beuve could speak of 'la littérature industrielle'.⁶⁸ Extending this argument, Christophe Charle has shown how the growth of the book trade—built upon an expansion of the reading public—and an expanding free press in the nineteenth century further served to enhance the autonomy of the writer. These factors, when combined with the gradual expansion of higher education, led to a significant increase in the numbers employed within the university and literary sectors of the economy, a development which itself gave rise to the concept of a literary bohemia existing in penury at the margins of conventional society. Moreover, as the power and authority of the Catholic Church continued to wane, men of letters came more and more to replace the priest as both society's guide and its repository of values. To refer to Christophe Charle again, he has shown how, as the nineteenth century progressed, the figures of the poet, the artist, the prophet, and, finally, the scientist were in turn accorded the status of being the voice of humanity. In summary, writers and intellectuals more generally were able over time to reduce their dependence upon both Church and State.

However, it would be a mistake to over-emphasize the innovatory aspects of the public sphere in the post-revolutionary period. The *salons* continued to play a key role as institutions of intellectual and political sociability until well into the nineteenth century.⁶⁹ If they were eclipsed during the Revolution, they were to an extent reconstituted by aristocratic émigrés forced into exile and were then revived in France under the Directory and, even more so, with the advent of the First Empire in 1804. According to Stephen Kale, between 1815 and 1848 the *salons* 'became the principal centres of elite political networking and discussion' and remained relatively free from repressive interference by the State. For example, the dominant political figure of the July Monarchy, François Guizot, arranged his social life around the *salon* of his mistress, the Princess Lieven. Likewise, Alexis de Tocqueville attended the *salons* of the Duchesse de Rauzannot, Madame de Castellane, and the Duchesse de Dino, the latter presided over by the illustrious Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, Prince of Benevento. Under the July Monarchy

⁶⁶ Paul Bénichou, *Le Sacre de l'écrivain 1750–1830: Essai sur l'avènement d'un pouvoir spirituel laïque dans la France moderne* (1996). See also Priscilla Parkhurst Clark, *Literary France: The Making of a Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), 126–58.

⁶⁷ Didier Masseau, *Les Ennemis des philosophes: L'Antiphilosophie au temps des Lumières* (2000), 273–320. See also Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford, 2001).

⁶⁸ 'Quelques Vérités sur la situation en littérature', in C. A. Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits Contemporains* (1846), 327–46.

⁶⁹ Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore, 2004).

Tocqueville was a regular attendee at the *salon* of the Princess Belgiojoso and at several other foreign *salons* in Paris.⁷⁰

The decline of the *salons* was a gradual, rather than a precipitate, one and they continued to flourish until their near-extinction in the late nineteenth century, receiving their last and possibly greatest literary invocation in the novels of Marcel Proust. Kale himself suggests several factors to explain their decline, not the least of which were the rise of parliamentary politics and a collapse of the aristocratic conception of the role of women, but the point is that the *salons* were replaced by new forms of intellectual sociability. Amongst these new sites were to be the newspaper editor's office, the publishing house, and the offices of the many literary and political reviews that flourished in the Paris of the *Belle Époque* and beyond. The weekly discussions that took place in the tiny Latin Quarter office of Charles Péguy's *Cahiers de la quinzaine* were fairly typical of the latter, as were later to be those at *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (under André Gide) and *Les Temps modernes* (under Jean-Paul Sartre). The Parisian café—of which there were an estimated 40,000 in the 1880s—also came to occupy a central place in intellectual life, with those of Saint-Germain-des-Prés becoming synonymous with French intellectual life.⁷¹ These varied institutions, with their discrete practices, have served to give a distinctive character to the manner in which political ideas have been expressed and articulated in France.

Nor should we ignore the restraints upon intellectual production in the periods both before and after 1789. Despite the growing importance of the Republic of Letters during the eighteenth century, writers for the most part continued to be drawn from the traditional elites of the *ancien régime* and few were those who were able to live by their pen alone. The reality for most was the garret, the café, and 'the columns of third-rate reviews'.⁷² The Revolution, in overthrowing monarchical and feudal power, largely put an end to royal and aristocratic patronage, leaving men of letters at the mercy of a commercial market that offered only limited economic support. Not surprisingly, therefore, the numbers involved still remained small, as was the readership of books, journals, and the popular press. The most prestigious review of the age, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, had only 350 subscribers in 1831 and still as few as 2,500 in 1846 (compared with the 13,500 subscribers to the *Edinburgh Review* in 1818). Despite a significant increase in the number of titles, the average circulation of provincial newspapers in this period was in the region of 700–1,500 copies. It is estimated that the number of new book titles rose from 800 in 1789 to 7,600 in 1850 and to 12,000 in the decade of the 1890s, but those like Victor Hugo and Émile Zola who earned a living from writing alone remained the exception.⁷³

⁷⁰ André Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography* (Baltimore, 1998), 398–9.

⁷¹ See Antony Beever and Artemis Cooper, *Paris After the Liberation 1944–1949* (London, 1995).

⁷² Robert Darnton, 'The Facts of Literary Life in Eighteenth-Century France', in Keith M. Baker (ed.), *The Political Culture of the Old Regime* (Oxford, 1987), 261–92.

⁷³ See Clark, *Literary France*, 37–60.

Censorship during the eighteenth century was generally agreed to be largely inefficient and ineffective—many books and newspapers banned in France were simply imported from the Netherlands and Britain—but it did exist and continued to make life difficult for those not prepared to toe the official line. There was, according to Charles Walton, ‘a widespread consensus that the State should maintain and reinforce moral values, customs, and manners’.⁷⁴ As Benjamin Constant was later to remind his readers, in 1767 edicts were passed which condemned to death authors of writings calculated to stir up people’s minds.⁷⁵ In 1789 the ‘free communication of ideas and opinions’ was recognized through Article 11 of the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen*, but, to refer again to Walton, the ‘surveillance, repression and manipulation’ of expressions of political opinions by the State continued to exist. Building upon a law on seditious speech passed in July 1791, the legislation of the Terror made the publication and expression of anti-patriotic and defamatory opinion a crime punishable by death. Napoleon I quickly re-established the censorship of books and the press, frequently subjecting journalists and writers to prosecution. For example, Destutt de Tracy’s important *Commentaire sur l’Esprit des lois de Montesquieu* was first published anonymously in Philadelphia in 1811,⁷⁶ whilst the liberal periodical *Le Censeur*, edited by Charles Comte and Charles Dunoyer, was closed down altogether. Press freedom (within limits) was reaffirmed in the constitutional charter of 1814 and further strengthened through a series of laws in 1819 (thereby enabling the press to play an important role in the downfall of Charles X in 1830) but the Villèle government ended jury trial for press offences so as to increase the likelihood of guilty verdicts. Restrictions continued under the July Monarchy after 1830. The September laws of 1835 increased the amount of caution money required by the government before a newspaper could be started and such was the general penury of the press that journalists were frequently compared to prostitutes. ‘The Restoration’, wrote Tocqueville in 1843, ‘was one long and imprudent battle by the government against the press. The years which have followed the July Revolution have presented the same spectacle with the difference, however, that under the Restoration it was the press that finished by defeating the government whilst in our day it is the government that has triumphed over the press.’⁷⁷ Controls over publishing media were augmented under the Second Republic (when newspapers were banned from saying anything insulting about the President) and again in the early years of the Second Empire (the amount required as caution money was raised

⁷⁴ *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Oxford, 2009), 10.

⁷⁵ Benjamin Constant, *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments* (Indianapolis, 2003), 152. Constant was mistaken about the date: the edicts were passed in 1757.

⁷⁶ See Gilbert Chinard, *Jefferson et les Idéologues d’après sa correspondance inédite* (Baltimore, 1925), 31–96.

⁷⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, ‘Lettres sur la situation intérieure de la France’, *Œuvres complètes* (1985), iii/2. 112. The French press, Tocqueville contended, had more power than its American opposite number. This was because it was concentrated in one place—Paris—and in fewer hands.

in 1852).⁷⁸ They were not relaxed with the advent of the Third Republic. Writing in 1873, the historian Edgar Quinet could comment that '[t]he condition of the writer is worse in France than in any other place in Europe: the law treats him as a suspect and surrounds him with mistrust and traps'.⁷⁹ It was only in 1881 that controls over the publication of books and newspapers were completely removed.

This new-found freedom, when combined with reduced production costs, improved distribution methods, and higher levels of literacy, encouraged a flourishing daily and periodical press, but this in turn brought a press that was both corrupt and controlled by financial interests.⁸⁰ Press restrictions were reimposed in the 1890s (in response to violence by anarchist groups) whilst the 1881 Act was suspended in 1940 with the fall of France and the beginning of the Vichy regime. In 1944 a set of ordinances banned any papers that had appeared under the German occupation and sought to protect the press from what were seen as dangerous commercial interests. This attempt to preserve the press from monopoly control was achieved at the expense of heavy reliance upon state subsidy. Newspaper sales per head of the population in France were lower than in any other industrialized western European country, except Italy. Moreover, at the height of the Algerian conflict in the late 1950s the State sought systematically to intimidate editors and journalists through the confiscation of their publications.

State control and censorship of the opera and the theatre—activities suspected of engendering unruly behaviour and of encouraging the expression of public opinion—were finally abolished only in 1907. If, in the eighteenth century, the *cause célèbre* was the production of Beaumarchais's *La Folle Journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro*, for her part, Sheryl Kroen has shown how the staging of Molière's anti-clerical *Tartuffe* became a source of popular demonstration against the religious policies of both Church and State during the Restoration and how, as a consequence, its performance was frequently banned by the authorities (as indeed it had been during the reign of Louis XIV).⁸¹ To that extent, calls for aesthetic purity, often justified in terms of art for art's sake, were frequently a reflection and product of political repression. After the Second World War radio and television broadcasting were a state monopoly. A powerful, and at times heavily interventionist, Ministry of Information oversaw the content of radio and television programmes, thereby ensuring that broadcasters could not forget that, in President Pompidou's words, they were 'the voice of France'. Only in the 1980s did the State begin to loosen its grip.

Likewise the State—especially in the period between the Restoration and the 1848 Revolution—kept a watchful eye over what was taught in universities and did not hesitate to remove troublesome academics when necessary. Both François

⁷⁸ Jules Simon commented of the laws operating under the Second Empire that 'it would be easy to show that [they] give to the administration the means to kill whatever paper they wish with extreme ease': *La Liberté politique* (1871), 208.

⁷⁹ Edgar Quinet, *La République, conditions de la régénération de la France* (1873), 120.

⁸⁰ See Christophe Charle, *Le Siècle de la presse* (2004).

⁸¹ Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theatre: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815–1830* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000).

Guizot and Jules Michelet were to fall victim to this practice. More oppressive still, the State resorted to imprisonment of those writers taken to be its opponents. In 1832 this fate was to befall two leaders of the Saint-Simonian movement, Prosper Enfantin and Michel Chevalier, and later afflicted Félicité de Lamennais, Alexis de Tocqueville, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and many others in the nineteenth century. Charles Maurras, the principal ideologue of the monarchist movement in the twentieth century, was imprisoned for his support for the Vichy regime. Many other writers were subject to the arbitrary exactions of the post-Second World War *épuration*. The State also upon occasion exacted the death penalty: Condorcet in the eighteenth century and Robert Brasillach in the twentieth century being two of the unfortunate victims.⁸²

But both the pre- and post-1789 French State has had more in its armoury than these formal instruments of control. It could ennoble. It could accord prestige. It could grant favours. After the Revolution, in other words, patronage was modified rather than abolished. For example, the young (and then monarchist) Victor Hugo received a modest annual stipend from Louis XVIII,⁸³ whilst after 1830 Chateaubriand lived off a sizeable pension provided by the exiled Bourbon monarch. Sainte-Beuve, Alexandre Dumas, Alfred de Musset, and many others received sinecures from the July Monarchy. Others, more numerous but more humble in aspiration, were prepared to accept employments from the State that were largely honorary and entailed few formal time-consuming duties. As Philip Mansel has commented, 'inside many French writers there was a courtier struggling to get out'.⁸⁴

Moreover, the great academic and literary institutions of the State, first created under the *ancien régime* and later reformed and enhanced under the First Empire and subsequent Republics, lost none of their power to seduce. Alexis de Tocqueville was by no means alone in devoting considerable time and energy to securing election to the Académie des Sciences morales et politiques and the Académie Française, nor in seeking to block the election of his rivals. Even in death—as has been the case with Voltaire, Rousseau, Condorcet, Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, André Malraux, and, most recently, Alexandre Dumas—the State, with all the symbolic authority at its disposal, can honour its writers by moving their remains to the hallowed site of the Panthéon. Lesser mortals can be offered one of the many honorific titles of distinction and recognition that the Republic, as much as any other of France's regimes, has used, in the words of Olivier Ihl, as a 'systematic instrument of governance'.⁸⁵ From Rousseau to Georges Sorel, from Paul Nizan to the writers of today's *Le Monde diplomatique*, there has been no shortage of commentators who have accused their fellows of undue subservience to the State.

⁸² Condorcet committed suicide before the day of his execution.

⁸³ The son of a Bonapartist general, Hugo effectively became official poet to the royal court: see Graham Robb, *Victor Hugo* (London, 1997).

⁸⁴ Philip Mansel, *Paris between Empires 1814–1852* (London, 2001), 311.

⁸⁵ Olivier Ihl, 'Emulation through Decoration: A Science of Government?', in Sudhir Hazareesingh (ed.), *The Jacobin Legacy in Modern France* (Oxford, 2002), 158–82. For a more extensive discussion see Olivier Ihl, *Le Mérite et la République: Essai sur la société des émules* (2007).

If Voltaire provided the first clear definition of the *philosophe*, he also illustrated another structural dimension of French intellectual life: banished from Paris, his career can be read as a sustained attempt to return to the capital. With the decline of the court in Versailles, the scene became, and still is, Paris, producing a geographical concentration of intellectual life which retains the capacity to bedazzle the foreign visitor.⁸⁶ In 1734 Marivaux felt able to comment that ‘Paris is the world; the rest of the earth is nothing but its suburbs.’⁸⁷ Accordingly, as Dena Goodman has observed: ‘over the course of the eighteenth century, aspiring young men of letters would pour into Paris from the provinces’.⁸⁸ This is a view confirmed by Madame de Staël. ‘[A]s those who are endowed with intellect feel the need to exert it’, she wrote, ‘so all who had any talent made their way immediately to the capital in the hope of obtaining employment.’⁸⁹ Accordingly, ‘le désert français’,⁹⁰ the barren and sleepy world beyond Paris’s ancient city walls, has had as its corollary the unrealistic hopes and frustrations suffered by generations of aspiring intellectuals from the provinces who, like Balzac’s ‘great man in embryo’, the poet Lucien Chardon of *Les Illusions perdues*, have scrambled for success and recognition in the metropolis.

Paris was also the capital of print.⁹¹ Publishing and consuming most of the nation’s book output, its libraries drew in scholars and the curious whilst its theatres and its concert halls attracted huge crowds. Paris’s population was substantially more literate than elsewhere in the country. It was also more cosmopolitan, drawing in exiles and visitors from all over Europe and America (and (later) from Africa and Asia).⁹² Rebuilt and embellished by the mid-nineteenth-century urban transformation masterminded by the Baron Haussmann, Paris was to be not merely the capital of France but the city of modernity and the metropolis of the civilized world.⁹³ Moreover, the city of Baudelaire’s *flâneur* itself became the subject of literary and artistic exploration and myth.

For all the loss of universal pretensions, little has changed over the last two hundred years or more. In Paris are still to be found all the great institutions of French intellectual life, its foremost educational establishments, its great museums, the major publishing houses, the daily and periodical press, and, not unimportantly, the centres of political and administrative power.⁹⁴ ‘Centralisation’, Jean-Paul Sartre

⁸⁶ See Patrice Higonnet, *Paris, Capital of the World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); Colin Jones, *Paris, Biography of a City* (London: 2004); Andrew Hussey, *Paris: The Hidden City* (London, 2006) and Graham Robb, *Parisians* (London, 2010).

⁸⁷ Quoted in Jones, *Paris, Biography*, 204.

⁸⁸ Goodman, *Republic of Letters*, 24.

⁸⁹ Germaine de Staël, *Considérations sur la Révolution française* (1983), 415.

⁹⁰ This phrase is associated with Jean-François Gravier’s *Paris et le désert français* (1947).

⁹¹ Mansel, *Paris between Empires*, 307–28, refers to Paris as the ‘City of Ink’.

⁹² See Lloyd S. Kramer, *Threshold of a New World: Intellectuals and the Exile Experience in Paris, 1830–1848* (Ithaca, NY, 1988).

⁹³ As part of the plan to showcase Paris as a world capital, four international exhibitions were held in 1855, 1867, 1878, and 1889. The last received over 32 million visitors.

⁹⁴ Further evidence of the dominance of Paris and the surrounding region is provided by the size of its population. As Graham Robb recounts, in 1801 more people lived in Paris than in the next six biggest cities combined. By 1886 the figure has risen to the next sixteen cities combined: see *The Discovery of France* (London, 2007), 3–18.

wrote, describing the situation of the writer in 1947, 'has grouped us all in Paris.'⁹⁵ A 'busy American' or 'trained cyclist', he added, could meet all the people he needed to know in twenty-four hours. Nowhere has this been truer than in the field of education. Here, as the work of Jean-François Sirinelli has revealed, the picture has been, and still is, one of a small and self-contained intellectual elite.⁹⁶

If Dena Goodman makes the point that, in the eighteenth century, young men of letters flocked to the capital, she also comments that they 'were in no hurry to leave Paris'. In later years this proved less to be the case, as we must not forget the numerous voyages undertaken voluntarily by French writers to such countries as Italy, Germany, England, Russia/the Soviet Union,⁹⁷ America,⁹⁸ the Orient, and, more recently, Maoist China and Castro's Cuba. But Goodman's observation contains more than a grain of truth. When Simone de Beauvoir visited New York for the first time in January 1947, for example, she was shocked to discover that she could love another city as much as she loved Paris.⁹⁹

The fact is, however, that quite frequently France's turbulent political history gave her writers no choice but to leave the capital. An astonishing number of the authors cited in this book spent either a small or a significant part of their careers in exile. If, as the example of Voltaire illustrates,¹⁰⁰ this was the case under the *ancien régime*, it was equally true during the period of the Revolution and the First Empire. Joseph de Maistre, sharing the enforced exile of many royalist sympathisers, wrote most of his diatribes against the Revolution in St Petersburg, whilst Madame de Staël, after years of involuntary travel across Europe, published her influential *De l'Allemagne* in London. It was also true of the Second Empire, when important exiles included Edgar Quinet, Jules Michelet, Jules Barni, Louis Blanc, and, most famously, Victor Hugo, who, like Chateaubriand before him, sought refuge in the Channel Islands. The experience was repeated under the Vichy regime, when Raymond Aron and Simone Weil followed General de Gaulle to London and others, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Georges Bernanos, found a safer haven in the United States¹⁰¹ or further afield in Latin America. The July Monarchy forced Étienne Cabet into exile and even the Third Republic drove Émile Zola abroad as he sought to avoid imprisonment after the publication of his open letter denouncing the miscarriage of justice involving Captain Alfred Dreyfus.¹⁰² As Madame de Staël commented, 'the fear of such an exile was

⁹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (London, 1967), 125.

⁹⁶ *Génération intellectuelle: Khâgneux et Normaliens dans l'entre-deux guerres* (1988).

⁹⁷ See in particular Astolphe de Custine's *La Russie en 1839* (1843).

⁹⁸ See Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of America* (Princeton, NJ, 1957).

⁹⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *L'Amérique au jour le jour* (1997), 104.

¹⁰⁰ See Ian Davidson, *Voltaire in Exile: The Last Years, 1753–78* (London, 2005).

¹⁰¹ See Jeffrey Mehlman, *Emigré New York: French Intellectuals in Wartime Manhattan, 1940–44* (Baltimore, 2000) and Emmanuelle Loyer, *Paris à New York: Intellectuels et artistes français en exil 1940–1947* (2005).

¹⁰² See Lloyd S. Kramer, 'S'exiler', in Duclert and Prochasson, *Dictionnaire critique de la République* (2002), 1042–50.

sufficient to reduce all the inhabitants of the principal city of the empire to slavery'.¹⁰³

Parisian dominance has taken another important form. Prior to, and immediately after, the Revolution, the linguistic map of France was immensely complex, constituting a rich mosaic of languages and dialects, many such as Breton and Alsatian quite distinct from French.¹⁰⁴ As Daniel Roche comments: 'in the eighteenth century, learned people began to think of these dialects and patois in terms of Parisian linguistic superiority: these impure tongues spoken by peasants and others threatened the purity of Paris'.¹⁰⁵ What occurred, following the policies introduced during the Revolution and after intended to silence these diverse tongues,¹⁰⁶ was the progressive triumph of the capital, with the result that France became increasingly characterized by linguistic homogeneity. By the end of the nineteenth century, the schoolteachers of the Third Republic, the so-called 'black hussars', had ensured that few, if any, linguistic barriers stood in the way of the circulation of (Parisian) ideas. As a consequence, the defence of France's indigenous languages, as with the cause of regionalism more generally, was until recently largely consigned to the advocates of Catholic and monarchical reaction.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, this provides a clue to the important cleavages that were to inform so much of French intellectual debate in the two centuries that followed the Revolution. Linguistic diversity was a reflection of regional and territorial fragmentation and this in turn had overlaid upon it a conflict between landed interests and the emerging industrial wealth of France's towns and cities. This powerful tension was only further exacerbated by the efforts of political elites to forge a national culture, especially when this entailed a challenge to the historically established corporate privileges of the Church. At issue was the control of values and of community norms, and this explains why one of the fundamental political questions of the age was all too frequently that of the control of education and of the educational system. The broader point is that the nationalization of intellectual life that occurred in France during the nineteenth century was a reflection of the nationalization of politics itself.¹⁰⁸

There is one further important structural dimension of French intellectual life meriting our attention. Recent research has shown that the emergence of the intellectual during the Dreyfus Affair at the end of the nineteenth century was intimately bound up with the ideal of the hero and with the themes of honour,

¹⁰³ De Staël, *Considérations*, 283. See Angelica Goodden, *Madame de Staël: The Dangerous Exile* (Oxford, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Robb, *Discovery of France*, 50–70.

¹⁰⁵ *France in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 240.

¹⁰⁶ See Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia, and Jacques Revel, *Une politique de la langue: La Révolution française et le patois* (1975) and Rita Hermon-Belot, *L'Abbé Grégoire: La Politique et la vérité* (2000), 322–57.

¹⁰⁷ The personal and political dimensions of the issues surrounding linguistic diversity have been explored in Mona Ozouf's *Composition française: Retour sur une enfance bretonne* (2009).

¹⁰⁸ See Jack Hayward, *Fragmented France: Two Centuries of Disputed Identity* (Oxford, 2007). See Daniele Caramani, *The Nationalization of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe* (Cambridge, 2004).

masculinity, and manhood.¹⁰⁹ For the anti-Dreyfusards, intellectuals were persistently (and easily) depicted as being weak, ineffectual, and therefore feminine, whilst those of the pro-Dreyfus cause were only too ready to portray themselves as men of action (and also to cast doubt about the sexual preferences of their opponents). On both sides, association with the feminine was part of a strategy of delegitimation.

Nevertheless, the Dreyfus Affair marked something of a minor breakthrough for women as intellectuals.¹¹⁰ Denied the right to vote, they were entitled to sign petitions (as twenty-three did with the 1898 *manifeste des intellectuels*) whilst the Dreyfusard Ligue des Droits de l'Homme opened up its membership to them. The feminist journal *La Fronde* actively campaigned for the Dreyfusard camp, notwithstanding that several popular women writers were prominent supporters of the nationalist Ligue de la Patrie Française.¹¹¹ More generally, the *Belle Époque* saw women entering the literary establishment for the first time and taking advantage of the new educational opportunities allowed them by the Third Republic.¹¹²

Yet, for all their presence in the imagery of the Republic, women were largely denied a public voice and scarcely existed as intellectuals. This was a far cry from the world of the eighteenth-century *salon*, where women played a leading role in the shaping of political debate, or from the heady excitement created by what Carla Hesse describes as 'the unprecedented opportunities for women' of the revolutionary decade itself.¹¹³ Post-revolutionary France, as Madame de Staël recognized, provided a far less favourable terrain for female involvement in political and intellectual life. '[S]ince the Revolution', she remarked, 'men have thought it politically and morally useful to reduce women to the most absurd mediocrity.' It was the fate of women 'who cultivated literature', she concluded, to suffer ridicule under monarchies and hate under republics.¹¹⁴

In post-revolutionary France access to education was restricted for women, as was career choice. Women were discouraged from reading (on the grounds that it was a dangerous and unfeminine activity) whilst those who did publish were largely restricted to the writing of domestic manuals and needed the authorization of their husbands to negotiate with a publisher. Women existed not as individuals but as

¹⁰⁹ See Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual* (New York, 1999); John Cerullo, 'Living the Dreyfusard Life: Violence, Manhood and the Intellectuals', paper presented to the French Historical Studies Association, Boston, Mass., 1996; and Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore, 2004).

¹¹⁰ See Françoise Blum, 'Itinéraires féministes à la lumière de l'Affaire', in Michel Leymarie (ed.), *La Postérité de l'affaire Dreyfus* (Lille, 1998), 93–101.

¹¹¹ See Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago, 2002), 107–64.

¹¹² See Gerald Leroy and Julie Bertrand-Sabiani, *La Vie littéraire à la Belle Époque* (1998). One should also not lose sight of the fact that many non-French female writers came to Paris: see Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank, Paris 1900–1940* (London, 1994).

¹¹³ Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), 42. See also Lucy Moore, *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France* (London, 2006).

¹¹⁴ Germaine de Staël, *Politics, Literature and National Character* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2000), 234–5.

members of families and therefore economic independence was refused them (including that enjoyed by men from an expanding cultural market in which women had no right to intellectual property).¹¹⁵ As Hesse observes: 'In legal terms, the Old Regime thus ended for women of letters, not in 1789 or 1793, nor even with the achievement of the suffrage in 1946, but in 1965 when they finally achieved legal and financial independence within marriage.'¹¹⁶

There were exceptions to this picture of exclusion, but even someone with the force of character of George Sand (née Aurore Dupin, baronne Dudevent) felt oddly diffident and ill at ease in the world of politics.¹¹⁷ That world was a male world, requiring the masculine qualities of reason and intelligence, the idea of the 'public man' being an object of honour and virtue, whilst that of a 'public woman' was an object of shame. The unstable crowd was feminine; women, when they entered politics, were a source of disorder.¹¹⁸ Such a vision was easily deployed by the many currents of anti-feminism that have littered France's recent past,¹¹⁹ but it was also central to France's dominant republican culture. As Michelle Perrot has written: 'the creation of a universalist and individualist citizenship has placed women in an inescapable position . . . Within this framework, women are more than ever reduced to their bodies, fettered to a constraining femininity.'¹²⁰ Only as individuals, and not as women, could they make demands upon a system that continues to be characterized by what Françoise Gaspard has described as 'l'homosocialité politique masculine'.¹²¹

The argument that the subordination of women is integral to France's revolutionary and republican culture has most forcefully been advanced by American historians, notably Joan Landes and Joan Scott.¹²² Here the view is that, if the Revolution initially opened up possibilities for the involvement of women in politics, these were quickly closed down, with women again being confined to a purely domestic role. This, for Joan Scott, is exemplified in the treatment received by Olympe de Gouges, authoress of the *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*. In 1793, she writes, 'de Gouge was read as an embodiment of the danger of chaos and unlawfulness', as a threat to 'rational social order and for the

¹¹⁵ See Annie Prassoloff, 'Le Statut juridique de la femme auteur', *Romantisme*, 77 (1992), 9–14.

¹¹⁶ Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, 78.

¹¹⁷ See Michelle Perrot, *Les Femmes ou les silences de l'histoire* (1998).

¹¹⁸ See Michelle Perrot, *Femmes politiques* (1998). The exclusion of women from the public world of politics was also mirrored in their progressive exclusion as economic actors in the market place: see Victoria E. Thompson, *The Virtuous Marketplace: Women and Men, Money and Politics in Paris, 1830–1870* (Baltimore, 2000).

¹¹⁹ See Christine Bard (ed.), *Un siècle d'antiféminisme* (1998).

¹²⁰ Perrot, *Les Femmes*, 276.

¹²¹ Françoise Gaspard, 'L'Antiféminisme en politique', in Bard, *Un siècle*, 340.

¹²² See Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 1988) and *Visualising the Nation: Gender, Representation and the Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY, 2001); Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996). See also Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, 1992); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), 151–91; and Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class, and Political Culture* (New Haven, Conn., 1989).

meanings of masculinity and femininity on which it had come to depend'. Arrested in July of that year, she was subsequently executed. This was not simply the result of her criticism of Robespierre and her support for the Girondin policy of federalism. As Scott goes on to explain: 'For the Jacobins, women's entire social function could be read literally from her body's reproductive organs, and especially from her breasts. . . . women as breast-nurturers but not creator. Man as citizen—the conqueror of nature. The differences between women and men were taken to be irreducible and fundamental.'¹²³ Virtue was a male category: a woman who sought to challenge that assumption could legitimately be subject to repression.

Scott's analysis of the fate of Olympe de Gouges highlights another important dimension to this question. Her overall point is that 'in France, until 1944, the common ground for individuality, as for citizenship, was masculinity',¹²⁴ but in this particular case she wants to argue that the views put forward by de Gouges constituted a direct challenge to 'the Revolution's continuing definition of women as passive citizens'. At the heart of the Revolution was a debate about representation, a debate that focused upon the definition of 'those capable of self-representation and those who could only be represented, those with and without autonomy'.¹²⁵ Women did not possess the capacity for autonomy.

III

How do these points relating to the structural dimensions of French intellectual life bear upon the issues raised by our discussion of the French Revolution? First, the emphasis upon the political history of the Revolution is not incompatible with an awareness of the importance of cultural and social practices. This was an argument made forcefully by Pierre Rosanvallon in his 2002 *Leçon inaugurale* to the Collège de France.¹²⁶ Political ideas and events, Rosanvallon stated, cannot be studied in isolation from the complex phenomena which make up a political culture. If this was true in general, it was especially the case in France where, according to Rosanvallon, politics 'does not only have as its function the guaranteeing of liberties and the regulation of collective life, as is the case in England and the United States'. From the Revolution onwards, on this view, politics has been intimately entwined with the social and the cultural, with the latter deriving much of their meaning and shape from the former. The political (*le politique*) denotes far more than the activity of politics narrowly defined (*la politique*).

Second, the Revolution, and the Republic it produced, gave birth to a prolonged and immensely sophisticated debate about what it meant to be a member of a political community and how that political community was to be organized. It was a debate about the very fundamentals of politics. In this lies what might be regarded as its endless fascination and richness. Here again arguments developed by

¹²³ Scott, *Only Paradoxes*, 49–50.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 10.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 35.

¹²⁶ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Leçon inaugurale* (2002). See 'Inaugural Lecture, Collège de France' in Samuel Moyn (ed.), *Pierre Rosanvallon: Democracy Past and Future* (New York, 2006), 31–58.

Rosanvallon provide enlightenment. At the heart of the issues raised by political modernity, he contends, is the 'indeterminate' character of democracy. Who or what is the subject of that democracy? Which has the superior claim, the political equality embodied in universal suffrage or the demands of rational governance? How can the sovereignty of the people be given a satisfactory institutional structure? Should emancipation within a democracy take the form of greater individual autonomy or social participation? Such questions, he argues, demonstrate that, as both a concept and a practice, democracy is marked by 'tensions' and 'equivocation'. Yet, as Rosanvallon has further argued, what occurred specifically in France during and after the Revolution was a failure properly to conceptualize the nature of representative democracy.¹²⁷ The far from uncontroversial charge is that the aspiration towards social unity combined with the principle of equality born with the Revolution produced what he terms a 'democracy of integration' which has been unresponsive to the demands of pluralism.¹²⁸

Moreover, Rosanvallon continues, the 'central question' which came to preoccupy the 'French political imagination' remained that of who held power rather than what form that power should take, 'the dynamic of sovereignty' pushing France between the opposites of absolute monarchy and a radical republic, with no thought to sovereignty's limitation. It has been, Rosanvallon writes, 'the kings of war and the kings of glory who [the French] admire'. Their ideal has been only to 'democratise absolutism', a secret aspiration given flesh in the 'republican monarchism' of General de Gaulle's Fifth Republic.¹²⁹ 'If the French in 1789', Rosanvallon writes, 'invented equality, they subsequently established a catalogue of the diseases and problems of modern democracy rather than their solutions. It is a specific form of universalism that is put forward by French democracy: far from constituting a model it is better seen as an inventory of the profound difficulties associated with political modernity.'¹³⁰ From this perspective, the Revolution of 1789 and the Republic that followed set out principles of political sovereignty and representation that were fundamentally flawed, and whose consequences were to be played out in French politics over the next two hundred years.

This is by no means a view shared by all. It would not be endorsed by those contemporary advocates of republicanism who still remain deeply hostile towards the claims of a pluralist democracy. Nor would this view secure the support of all the historians working in the field. For example, 1998 saw the publication of Patrice Higonnet's *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution*.¹³¹

¹²⁷ This is the subject matter of three volumes: *Le Sacre du citoyen: Histoire du suffrage universel en France* (1992); *Le Peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (1998); *La Démocratie inachevée: Histoire de la souveraineté du peuple en France* (2000).

¹²⁸ See Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Modèle politique français: La Société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours* (2004). Rosanvallon's subject here is what he terms 'la culture politique de la généralité'.

¹²⁹ See Pierre Rosanvallon, *La Monarchie impossible: Les Chartes de 1814 et 1830* (1994), 149–81.

¹³⁰ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Sacre du citoyen: Histoire du suffrage universel en France* (1992), 455.

¹³¹ (Princeton, NJ, 1998). See also Anne Sa'adah, *The Shaping of Liberal Politics in Revolutionary France: A Comparative Perspective* (Princeton, NJ, 1990). Whilst recognizing that it would be 'tendentious' to present revolutionary Jacobinism as a form of liberalism, Sa'adah nevertheless argues that Jacobinism presented 'a second model of liberal politics, even more wary of political power than its

Breaking with the recent revisionist account of the Revolution associated with François Furet, Higonnet's book amounts to a defence of the Jacobins and attempts to attribute the descent into Terror to what he repeatedly describes as 'instincts' or habits of mind rather than to the ideology of the Jacobins themselves. The Terror, he writes, was 'a brutalized, backward-looking gesture of despair', drawing upon 'long habits of absolutist politics and intolerant religion'. The 'nobility' of the Jacobins' message—described as the 'desire to harmonize the private and the public through purposeful and libertarian civic-mindedness'—needs to be separated from their 'flaws, errors and liabilities'. This has important conclusions. 'Jacobinism', he writes, 'can still be a model for modern democrats'. It puts to shame 'our own inactive allegiance to socially inert and pluralistic democracy'.

For all that this account of the nature of Jacobinism is both implausible and unconvincing, it nevertheless underscores the continued importance and interest of the events which surrounded this experience. As all those who witnessed the Revolution realized, nothing like it had been seen before. So too they understood that the world would never be the same again. It was not just the language of politics that changed but its location and its actors. A whole new vocabulary of politics came into existence. Court politics was replaced by street politics. Aristocrats departed the stage, to be replaced by the people and those who presumed to speak in their name. New institutional forms of politics appeared. With this, the style of politics, as well as the values embodied in politics as an activity, was dramatically revised. So also were the very goals of politics. Gone were its limited ambitions and its preoccupations with dynastic rivalries: in came a vision of politics that placed it, for good or ill, at the centre of human existence and that saw political activity as a means of social transformation and regeneration. All of this was to be a source of dramatic instability and contestation, flowing beyond the borders of France and beyond the confines of the revolutionary decade.

How might these complex patterns of thinking be studied? What form will our analysis and discussion take? Pierre Rosanvallon has spoken of what he terms 'a conceptual history of politics'. The argument in this volume will take something of this form. The structure of the book will not therefore be crudely chronological. Nor will it work its way systematically through a list of authors and their texts. Rather, it will focus upon a set of core concepts and ideas around which political theory and practice have been structured in France since the eighteenth century, acknowledging both that concepts gain their meaning from their respective historical contexts and from how they are used by historical actors. If conceptual change during this period was extensive, the surprise (perhaps) is that a society characterized by such social and political instability provides evidence of considerable conceptual continuity over time. The potential range of material that could be covered is vast and it would be folly to aspire to anything like comprehensive or encyclopedic coverage. Accordingly, the material under consideration is structured around a loose, but overarching, organizational principle: namely, that political

Anglo-American counterpart' (p. 197). In her view, Jacobinism established 'the primacy of the liberal agenda in France'.

thought in France can be read as a continuous and open-ended debate about the meaning of the Revolution of 1789 and the form of republican government that it gave rise to. The individual chapters are not ordered according to any strict unilinear sequence—indeed, it might well be judged to be the case that they can be read individually and out of sequence—but the book as a whole does possess a certain narrative logic which moves the argument forward to the present day. Having (hopefully) reached this point, the reader should not expect a series of resounding and forthright conclusions. The aim is to provide what might be seen as a broad conspectus of the French political tradition as it has evolved over the past two hundred years and more. It is in the nature of such an account that it can never be complete or definitive. The questions we ask of a political tradition change as our own preoccupations themselves change. To paraphrase Alexis de Tocqueville, however, it is to be hoped that the subject matter of what follows will be the object of both admiration and alarm, and certainly not of indifference.