Friendship and Politics in Post-Revolutionary France

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The uses of affection and mobilization of personal ties to practice politics emerged in part from long-standing traditions that dated back to at least the sixteenth century. Throughout the Old Regime, ruling elites relied on social relationships to access power. Love also had a public role as the bond of the hierarchical corporate order and as an element in the language of politics. In practice, however, the nature of politics during the Old Regime imposed considerable emotional constraints. In the eighteenth century, the culture of sentimentalism came to challenge this emotional regime. Sentimentalists maintained that love was an essential element of the social order, but they saw love as operating horizontally, not vertically. Affection was an equalizing force and a tie between individuals, as opposed to the bond between hierarchically disposed members of a corporate social order. This new vision of society would intersect with an increased emphasis on friendship as a freely chosen bond among individuals, and with the flourishing of an associational life that allowed men and women to interact with one another based on shared interests as opposed to corporate identities.

The revolutionaries were the heirs to this culture of sentimentalism, just as they drew on the legacy of how men and women practiced politics in the Old Regime. Historians have also come to see the Revolution as a particularly emotional experience, as politicians cycled rapidly from joy to fear. Until the end of the Terror, many revolutionaries hoped that love would tie the newly regenerated nation together. In practice, however, ideological positions redrew the lines of personal networks and the course of revolutionary politics complicated interpersonal relations. The ideological divisions and negative emotions that came to the fore during the Terror led individuals to distrust
one another and even the meaning of emotional expressions. Hence, in the aftermath of the Terror, affection could no longer be understood as an element of the social order, as it had been for centuries.

Napoleon attempted to heal the ideological cleavages within French society and create a new unified elite. While he largely abandoned any notions of marshaling sentiment to solidify his regime, he placed high society under his control through both the annexing of elite sociability and the extensive use of police surveillance. In turn, this police state sowed increasing distrust among elites. As a result, the men and women of the post-revolutionary era had to contend with this legacy of distrust and division, as well as the successive collapse of two social orders, one based on authority and one based on egalitarian love. And thus, from the Thermidorian period until the mid-nineteenth century, authors and political figures spoke of the Revolution as an atomizing force, one that left nothing but a society of individuals.

While this chapter discusses pre-revolutionary and revolutionary models and uses of friendship, it concentrates on questions about personal ties and the emotions more generally. It also focuses on the issues that would become prominent in the period after 1815: the reliance on personal networks to practice politics, the role of the rhetoric of friendship in political negotiations, the ability of ideological divisions to reshape social bonds, and the gendering (or lack thereof) of political functions. Thus one aim of this chapter is to show how the men and women of the post-revolutionary era both drew on and transformed old habits and practices. At the same time, it also illuminates some of the origins of the problems the political elites of the early nineteenth century faced as they coped with a society that had been pulled apart by distrust and ideological tensions.

POLÍTICAS EN EL ÁMBITO DEL ANTIGUO REGIMEN

The idea that politics was a deeply personal business would have been familiar to the elites of early modern France. The patronage-based politics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries required the cultivation of personal networks; men and women also used emotional rhetoric to describe their allegiances. At the court of Versailles, factions formed around ties of kinship and friendship. And while there were significant differences between the political systems of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and that of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both forms of governance required
the mastery or deployment of emotions for strategic gain. In both periods, too, social ties facilitated politics within the confines of a hierarchical, corporate social order.

In early modern France, a period when the French state was not yet centralized or bureaucratized, all politics were personal. In the words of Jay Smith, “In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, all who exercised power still took it for granted that relationships of one individual to another formed the basis of order in every community.” Political theorists maintained that love was fundamental to the social order, as it bound individuals and corporate groups together in vertical chains. Correspondingly, the language of politics was one of affection, and patron/client ties were suffused with a rhetoric of emotional devotion. For instance, in 1648, Charles de Grimaldi, the marquis de Régusse, sought the patronage of cardinal Mazarin and so wrote Mazarin a letter in which he stated, “Of all Your creatures, there will never be one more submissive or attached than I. . . . I shall seek every day an occasion to show you the growing esteem and friendship which makes me affectively inclined to render you service.” This was a vision of friendship as a tie of dependence, hence Régusse’s use of words like “submissive” and “creature.” He was not offering to be the companion of Mazarin’s days, but to be a faithful servant through such words of affection. Nor were Régusse’s words meant to serve as a reflection of his actual feelings. Rather, emotional expression was a tool for political advancement.

Likewise, social ties were vital resources in the patronage economy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Patronage networks typically included family members, domestic officers, and those who worked on a noble’s estates. An individual’s first recourse was usually to members of his or her lineage. For instance, Jean Baptiste Colbert got his start in government service through a cousin, Michel Le Tellier’s brother-in-law. When Le Tellier became secretary of state for war, he rewarded both Colbert and Colbert’s cousin with positions. Bonds with non-kin also helped individuals find advancement; Le Tellier, for instance, owed his post to his friend Mazarin. Corporate ties opened up doors to potential patrons and clients as well. Thus Anne de Montmorency, who wielded great power under François I and Henri II, aided the men who belonged to the company he captained.

In this system, noblewomen served as both patrons and clients. Royal women had the most direct access to political power; for instance, François I invested his sister Marguerite de Navarre with considerable authority. He gave her the duchy of Berry, and her marriage contract stipulated that she—and
not her husband—controlled her lands. Marguerite was thus François’s client and an individual who dispensed considerable patronage on her own. She was also an important broker who served as the link between her own clientele and that of the king, and connected the families of her birth and her marriage. This last function was a gendered one; women, unlike men, belonged to multiple families. Yet many of the other roles that women played were not gendered. Women as well as men served as brokers, and prominent noblemen acted as bridging figures between regional and royal patronage networks.¹⁰

While patronage power shifted from the hands of the nobility to the monarchy during the reign of Louis XIV, personal ties remained crucial to political activity. For instance, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie notes that kinship and friendships held together the three different political groupings prominent at Versailles in 1709. The first, organized around Mme de Maintenon, was the most conservative and oriented toward the military; another centered on the dauphin; while the third—the most reformist—looked toward the dauphin’s son, the duc de Bourgogne. These factions were organized around personal networks. Maintenon’s cabal included members of the Le Tellier clan as well as Marshal Harcourt, who had been friends with the late Michel Le Tellier. Among the members of the second groups were the dauphin’s half sister Madame la Duchesse and another one of her half brothers; members of the Colbert family clustered around the duc de Bourgogne. There were also ties between cabals; since Louis XIV was aging, the men of the first cabal—the one most closely aligned with the king—realized full well that they needed to be on good terms with the dauphin. Women also served as intermediaries between these groupings and maintained connections between camps. The duchesse de Bourgogne was married to the leader of the third cabal and friends with Mme de Maintenon.¹¹ Thus, while once again women had important roles as go-betweens, this was not exclusively a role that belonged to them, as men retained good relations among factions. Women, too, could be just as invested in the success of their particular cabal as men were; after all, Mme de Maintenon was the leader of one of these groupings.

During the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI, the nobility no longer conceived of politics as being an entirely personal affair. Military officers, for instance, ceased to understand that they acted out of personal loyalty to the king. Instead, they saw themselves as servants to the state or the public.¹² Yet the same importance of social ties to the political system is also apparent in the court politics of Louis XV and Louis XVI. Under these two kings, ministers
sought to win over those close to the king—and wives and mistresses most notably. In part, this was because of the necessity of intermediaries within the courtly politics of Versailles. In a system with a vast number of supplicants asking for favors, individuals had to appeal to the king through those close to him to get his attention. Alternately, for ministers advocating for their position, obtaining the support of the king’s mistress (in the case of Louis XV) or the king’s wife (in Louis XVI’s case) ensured that they would have an advocate in the king’s inner circle, one whose access to him was unreserved. And in this climate where social relations determined one’s success (or failure), all interpersonal contact was a matter of self-interest and scrutiny, just as emotional expressions had to be controlled in order to master the game of court life. Thus the goal of every personal interaction was not the expression of one’s true feelings, but obtaining some advantage and advancing within the hierarchical confines of Versailles. For this reason, courtiers had to master their emotions; expressing what one truly felt would reveal too much about one’s intentions. Failure to control one’s affects was thus a sign that one did not have the fortitude to survive at court.\textsuperscript{13}

Hence, in certain structural respects, the politics of the court of Versailles were similar to the early modern patronage-based system. These were both hierarchical political cultures in which success was a matter of finding favor and attention from one’s superiors, whether a great noble or the king. And to master the game within these vertically oriented systems, individuals needed to marshal their emotions and their personal relations. Because power was often informal and based on personal connections, women served as brokers and backers, although men also functioned as intermediaries, patrons, and leaders of political groupings.

\textbf{THE SENTIMENTAL SOCIAL ORDER OF THE EIGHTEEN CENTURY}

The eighteenth century saw the rise of a new conception of society and the self that challenged the hierarchical corporate social order. The cultural movement known as sentimentalism offered a new model for personal relations based on open expressions of sentiment. Sentimentalism also stressed individualism and choice and contained an egalitarian strain within it. Friendship—an elective bond based on affection—fit with this new desire to imagine a society based on horizontal affection and not vertical authority.
Correspondingly, new spaces of sociability opened up and the eighteenth century saw a burgeoning associational life in which men and women came together based on personal inclination.

In contrast to the norms of emotional control at Versailles, sentimentalism placed the examination and expression of feelings front and center. Novels—perhaps most famously Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Julie; ou, La Nouvelle Héloïse*—were replete with profusions of emotion, as characters poured their hearts out to each other and cataloged the nature of their affections in exacting detail. Sentimentalism had philosophical dimensions as well. Denis Diderot, Adam Smith, and David Hume all described the importance of emotions for the self and society. For instance, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith states that feeling was the basis for morality. In turn, sentimentalists regarded emotionality as an indication of sincerity, openness, and virtue. In these respects, sentimentalism was an oppositional movement that challenged the social and political structure of the Old Regime. After all, if morality arose from sentiment, then individuals just needed to cultivate their innate capacity for feeling to be moral creatures, and they therefore did not need the structures of the Church or the state. Crucially, too, sentimentalism contained a democratic current within it;sentimentalist novels, for instance, allowed readers to imagine a society that was individualistic and egalitarian and not hierarchical and corporate. In the words of Lynn Hunt, “Novels made the middle-class Julie and even servants like Pamela, the heroine of Samuel Richardson’s novel by that name, the equal and even the better of rich men such as Mr. B, Pamela’s employer and would-be seducer. Novels made the point that all people are fundamentally similar because of their inner feelings, and many novels showcased in particular the desire for autonomy.”

Sentimentalism was a significant reworking of earlier notions regarding the operations of love in both political and familial contexts. It challenged—rather than upheld—established hierarchies precisely because sentimentalist affection worked horizontally, not vertically. For instance, if love and not paternal power was the bond between family members, fathers could no longer serve as distant rulers of their children. Similarly, the idea that marriages should be founded on love, not economic consideration, meant that the spouses should choose their partners. Likewise, the royal politics of sentiment in the eighteenth century acquired a new cast. During the reign of Louis XV, royal apologists spoke of the king as “le Bien-Aimé” (“the well loved”). If Louis XV was noted for being beloved, this meant that he was beholden to his subjects, not just vice versa. The love between the king and his
The eighteenth century also saw the flourishing of associational life in the form of provincial academies, clubs, and Masonic lodges and the growth of opportunities for socializing in salons and cafés. These institutions and spaces expanded the horizons of the men and women who frequented them; the ties of family, religion, and corporate order no longer defined an individual’s social orbit. Freemasonry is paradigmatic of this shift. Masonic lodges allowed aristocrats and members of the Third Estate to come together, and in theory one ascended the Masonic hierarchy based on merit and not status. Participation was also voluntary; one chose to be a Mason, while in contrast, one did not necessarily chose one’s corporate status in the Old Regime. Thus Ran Halévi argues that Masonry was fundamental to the emergence of a “democratic sociability” in the eighteenth century. Alternately, Richard Sennett describes how the associational life of the eighteenth century taught individuals how to enjoy public, impersonal forms of sociability. Clubs and salons thus allowed for the construction of new identities and forms of cooperation and trust among the elites who participated in them.

Ties of friendship were also part of sentimentalism and the emergence of new forms of sociability. For instance, terms of friendship permeated Masonry, as Masons called one another “friends” and lodges were named “Les Vrais Amis” or “La Réunion des Amis Intimes.” Many salonnières also idolized friendship as the cement of their gatherings, while sentimentalist authors praised friendship as a perfect human relationship. In Rousseau’s Julie, for example, friendship is a site of transparency and idealized affection. In one letter to his friend Milord Édouard, Saint-Preux describes the joys of mornings with Julie and her family by stating, “Breakfast is the meal of friends; the house staff are excluded, the unwanted do not intrude; we say everything we think, we reveal all our secrets, we constrain none of our sentiments; there we can give in without imprudence to the satisfactions of confidence and intimacy.” As an epistolary novel, this work relies on the free communication between correspondents to enable readers to grasp the feelings and intentions of the characters. We know of the sincerity and depth of Julie and Saint-Preux’s passions both because of their letters to each other and because of their correspondence with their friends.

In the eighteenth century, then, affection had a clear public significance as the cement of a new civic order. And in contrast to earlier understandings of the political role of love, affection was horizontal and not vertical in its
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This more egalitarian vision of society was also more individualistic, for men and women could find affiliations outside of kinship networks and corporate ties. These new understandings of personal relations were thus less a support for the existing political and social order than a challenge to its very nature.

The Passions of the Revolution

This ideal of universal, egalitarian, and individualistic affection held a powerful appeal during the Revolution. With the destruction of the hierarchical, corporate social order of the Old Regime, revolutionaries were left with the task of understanding what could unite the citizens of a regenerated nation. An all-embracing love in the form of fraternité became one source of connection between the men and women of the new France. In practice, too, revolutionary politics created new bonds of solidarity as political groupings crystallized around personal networks. But positive, unifying emotions were not the only feelings brought to the fore. After 1792 fear, distrust, and anxiety became more prominent among both revolutionaries and their opponents. Revolutionary politics also divided citizens along ideological lines and made having the wrong friends deadly. Hence, while politicians continued to operate in a sentimental mode even during the Terror, the actions of revolutionaries revealed both the impossibility of understanding sentiment as a force for national unity and the danger of relying on public emotions.24

Although both positive and negative emotions were close at hand from the beginning of the Revolution, historians see expressions of affection and hopes for reconciliation as dominating its early years.25 Thus the opening of the Estates General was an emotional affair; one deputy wrote in his diary that “it was impossible to hold back tears” and that “all deputies blessed with a little sensibility must have regarded this day as the most beautiful and the most glorious of their lives.”26 Such transports of happiness also accompanied the arrival of members of the First and Second Estate into the National Assembly. As Jean François Gaultier de Biauzat described it, “We openly wept with indescribable joy, like people whose hearts are so unaccustomed to happiness that they cannot hold up under the emotion caused by such a strange new order of things.”27 Gaultier’s reference to the “strange new order of things” indicates how the political ferment of the moment liberated positive affects. Indeed, even those who were not directly involved in the Revolution could
find themselves swept away by its emotional tide. Writing of the relationships among radicals in 1790s Britain, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob claim that the Revolution “generated a new affective intensity among men” and opened up a space for social, sexual, and emotional experimentation. Indeed in a letter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet Robert Southey wrote of the “orgasm of the Revolution.”

The summer of 1789 also saw darker emotions among revolutionaries—most notably fear. Popular violence was one source of anxiety, particularly around the fall of the Bastille. Deputies feared for their own personal safety and an attack from the king’s forces. One deputy stated that he and his colleagues were “continually alternating between fear and hope” due to the course of events. It was also the essence of revolutionary politics that led to this emotional instability. As Timothy Tackett writes, “Fluctuations of this kind could be attributed in part to the nature of the situation in which the deputies now found themselves: a kind of liminal state between the old and the new, in which much of the world they had previously known was collapsing or being torn down around them.”

The momentous events of August 4 are representative of how emotions—both positive and negative—shaped revolutionary politics. Fears of rural unrest drove the deputies to abolish feudal privileges at the same time as love and a desire for reconciliation led them to begin the process of destroying the corporate order. In their letters and memoirs, deputies recalled the emotional intensity of this night. One exclaimed, “We wept, we hugged one another. What a nation! What glory! What an honor to be French!” while another stated, “We wept with joy and emotion. Deputies, without distinction, treated one another with fraternal friendship.” August 4 was a sentimentalist’s dream come true: love was remaking the nation around the principles of individualism and equality.

At the same time, political ferment reshaped friendship networks, elite sociability, and associational life. More than one thousand political clubs opened up in the first three years of the Revolution, while Parisian salons became increasingly politicized. Some salons served as meeting places for like-minded politicians, while others were more ideologically heterogeneous and allowed political figures to reach out to potential allies. Ideological positions also drove politicians apart and brought them together. By 1790, men of different factions found that they could no longer be friends with one another. One deputy named Périsse felt he had to cut his ties to the comte de Virieu, who was to his right. He wrote, “The division within the Assembly is so
extreme, that I would be suspected by the Friends of the Constitution if I were seen having relations with any of them.” Shared politics was also a force for cohesion. In the words of one Jacobin deputy, “There are two or three hundred of us [i.e., Jacobins] here bound together forever. Without even knowing one another’s names, we are such good friends, and so strongly linked, that hereafter, it will be impossible to travel in the kingdom, without encountering colleagues and friends.” As a vision of friendship, this was a remarkably impersonal one; all that was required was a shared political affiliation and not actual knowledge of another.

This description of friendship bears striking similarities to the notion of fraternity, the last element of the revolutionary triad and the one that dealt most specifically with how the citizens of France should relate to one another. Fraternity was another adaptation of the sentimentalist social order, for it proposed that love was the bond of society. In the early years of the Revolution, fraternity was a way to imagine national unity and to understand how the men and women of France could overcome social divisions. This initial impulse toward fraternal desire came not from the central government, but largely from the ground up and from the members of the National Guard, who swore oaths to fraternity. If fraternity was a disposition to one’s fellow citizens, it could also be a guiding principle of behavior toward all peoples. For instance, revolutionary legislators abolished the droit d’aubaine (a rule by which all the property of a deceased foreigner was confiscated to the use of the state) on the grounds that it was “against the principles of fraternity which should tie all men, whatever their country and their government.”

It was this universalism and the very public nature of fraternity that made it distinct from friendship. The latter bond was particularized; one was friends with a select few. Fraternity, however, did not depend on choice and had nothing to do with recognizing the special qualities of those to whom it was extended. It was instead the reflexive way one treated others. Fraternity was thus transparent and public, whereas friendship was a private passion. Friendship implies notions of preference, too, while fraternity did not recognize personal inclination. This is not to say that friendship and fraternity were seen as conflicting passions; instead, they could be regarded as different forms of the same love for humankind, one of which was more intimate and the other of which was universal.

As the Revolution radicalized, both the workings of fraternity and the more general emotional tone of the revolutionaries shifted, and historians argue that darker feelings—and fear in particular—predominated after 1792.
The flight of the king to Varennes in June 1791 left revolutionary politicians feeling betrayed, and fueled fears about counterrevolutionary conspiracies. Such intense suspicion drove the violence of the more radical stages of the Revolution. In the words of Patrice Higonnet, “For the men—and women—of 1791–2, the decomposition of the Jacobins’ universalizing purpose and the ruin of their Enlightened hopes brought into question their newly acquired and constructed sense of self, their social purpose and their understanding of world history.” In turn, the revolutionaries reacted to the failure of their dreams through “private rage and then discouragement and fright”; it was this fear—or trauma, in his terms—that would give birth to the Terror.

Despite the swirl of negative emotions, the revolutionaries continued to cling to their sentimentalist vision of society, although they turned to a more étatiste model of universal affection. For one, in contrast to the early years of the Revolution—which saw a flourishing of clubs and organized political sociability—the government became increasingly opposed to associational life. As Christine Adams states, “Because the National Convention—the state—represented the general will, which was sovereign, it had to destroy all individual initiatives . . . that might impede its reach. Accordingly, the Convention abolished all educational, literary, scientific, and charitable societies.” The state—and not its citizens—would direct civil society. Pierre Rosanvallon calls this formation “utopian generality,” as revolutionaries felt that intermediary bodies prevented social and political unity. This was a vision of individualism in which nothing was to obstruct the relationship between state and citizen.

The period after 1792 also saw the centralization of political love. The Jacobins, for instance, maintained that fraternity was a duty. Saint-Just was particularly preoccupied with friendship. In his “Institutions républicaines,” he describes that anyone without friends was immoral and therefore should be banished from his ideal state. Yet fraternity was no longer understood to be universal and was not necessarily extended to the Revolution’s enemies. In the words of Bertrand Barère, “During revolution patriots should concentrate their fraternity on each other as they are united by a common interest. Aristocrats have no home here and our enemies cannot be our brothers.” Likewise, the Montagnards began to see fraternity as a sentiment that had to be imposed (or at the very least cultivated), and relied on revolutionary festivals to do so. This same marshaling of the affections is apparent in legislation, as laws mandated emotional dispositions. Notably, the Law of Suspects decreed the arrest of “those who, either by their conduct or by their relations,
by their words or writings, have shown themselves to be partisans of tyranny . . . or enemies of liberty,” while relatives of émigrés needed to have “constantly shown their attachment to the Revolution” if they wanted to avoid detention.  

Affection was also to have a role in overcoming the divisions within the nation—and factional ones in particular. Most famously, there was the kiss of Lamourette; on July 7, 1792, Antoine Adrien Lamourette, a deputy to the Legislative Assembly, convinced his colleagues that the problems facing France—a war that was going badly, a monarchy conspiring against the Revolution, and a government fracturing under the weight of political divisions—could be solved if the deputies loved one another more. Responding to Lamourette’s speech, the members of the Assembly embraced one another and vowed their undying affection for one another. Alternately, consider an August 1793 letter from Joseph Fouché, then député en mission, in which he describes the events in a small town in the Nièvre. He writes, “The hellish demon who is tearing into one part of the Republic had managed to divide citizens, friends, brothers, spouses and their unfortunate children.” But through Fouché’s work, “all the citizens came together and embraced each other. Light-hearted songs, dances, patriotic sounds of a warlike music, artillery salvos, prolonged cries of ‘Long live the Mountain! Long live the Constitution!’ announced to all the neighboring communes the happy festival of a general and fraternal reunion around the tree of liberty.” Love conquered all as factional fighting gave way to union and joy.

Personal ties remained central to radical politics as political coteries continued to function as friendship networks. This was especially true for the Girondins. Many Girondins had been friends with one another since before the Revolution, as was the case with Jean Marie Roland and Jacques Pierre Brissot, two of the most prominent members of this faction. Some of the Montagnards were friends as well. Robespierre was close to both Saint-Just and Georges Couthon, two of his chief collaborators, and he relied on friends to recommend individuals for governmental positions. Sociability also helped politicians coordinate their actions. Mme Roland stated that at her salon her guests “kept up the kind of liaison that is needful among men devoted to public affairs . . . who must be well informed, the better to serve the public.”

Yet such personal ties between politicians could also be very dangerous. Some Jacobin thinkers, for instance, perceived that friendship was too exclusive. As a private passion, it detracted from the universal commitment to others that the Republic required. Transacting politics through friendship
was seen as highly problematic because it was a form of politics that lacked transparency, and in some cases ties of friendship offered proof of conspiracy. Thus, when twenty-one Girondins were tried in October 1793, their personal connections to one another were regarded as a sign of how suspect they were. In the absence of any evidence that the Girondins were actually conspiring together, the Montagnards used proof of the close ties between these men to suggest that they were working against the revolutionary government. Others, too, found that there were perils to being friends with the wrong person. Camille Desmoulins, for instance, attributed his death sentence to his friendship with Georges Danton. This notion that one’s personal connections were a sign of counterrevolutionary beliefs or activity was enshrined into law, as the Law of Suspects proposed that individuals could be detained if they had social ties with counterrevolutionaries.

The Terror also spread distrust into society and divided the nation along ideological lines. Indeed, suspicion was inherent in revolutionary politics—what, after all, is the obsession with conspiracies if not a profound distrust of the motives and methods of others? Again, the necessity of suspicion became a legal matter. Under the Law of 22 Prairial, citizens had a duty to turn in any counterrevolutionaries they encountered. Hence, good revolutionaries had to be on the watch for suspicious activity and to distrust those around them. Nor could one count on personal loyalty during the Terror. Perhaps most famously, Desmoulins was a childhood friend of Robespierre, but Robespierre nonetheless signed his death warrant in March 1794. Their relationship is but one example of how ideological differences destroyed personal ties. The two had been allies for years, but their friendship ended—with deadly consequences—when Desmoulins came to oppose Robespierre and other Montagnards in winter 1793–94. Personal betrayal was even a task for all good citizens as denunciation became a patriotic duty during the radical stages of the Revolution. Denunciation both arises out of distrust and is a betrayal of trust, for it can occur when an individual confides in a friend or family member who discloses sensitive information to the government. Good citizens were to betray their intimates; anyone with anything to hide had to be fearful of friends and family members.

Lastly, the Terror showed the limits of basing a political order around sentimentalism. For one, it became clear that the dream of reconciliation through love was impossible. Despite Lamourette’s kiss, factionalism plagued revolutionary politics. In creating ideology—including the notions of “left” and “right”—the Revolution engendered divisions that were too powerful to
overcome through outpourings of affection.54 Alternately, consider a February 1793 letter from Robespierre to Danton. After the latter’s wife died, the former wrote, “I love you more than ever, and unto death.”55 Robespierre’s claim may very well have been sincere, but the state of Robespierre’s feelings in early 1793 did not prevent him from helping usher Danton to that death over a year later. If one problem with the revolutionary politics of sentimentalism was that the emotions were too unstable, another was the issue of hypocrisy. In a political culture in which individuals were to marshal and display their emotions, how could anyone trust that others were actually feeling what they said they were feeling? Could one even trust oneself to be overcome by the appropriate emotions at the appropriate time?56

The fall of Robespierre and the liquidation of the Terror saw a retreat from sentimentalist politics. Historians have spoken of the emotional tone of the Thermidorian period and the Directory as being one of cynicism, disillusionment, and bitterness, a climate in which revolutionaries could no longer promote ideals of universal love. Instead, self-interest became the foundation of the social order. Philosophers asserted that interest, not emotion, was the basis for morality, while the Constitution of the Year III, in which voting rights were based on ownership of property, established that interest was the guarantee of order.57

The Thermidorian period also saw the articulation of anxieties about social dissolution, ones that would resonate into the nineteenth century. When they spoke of the effects of the Terror, revolutionary politicians focused on the anomie of French society. Thus, for instance, the Conventionnel Jean Lambert Tallien gave a speech in September 1794 in which he stated, “The Terror breaks all bonds, extinguishes all affections; it defraternizes, desocializes, demoralizes.”58 He also described how the Terror spread fear and distrust throughout society by “setting a trap under each step, placing a spy in every home, a traitor in every family.”59 To be sure, Tallien’s speech allowed him to distance himself from his own participation in the Terror and paint himself as its victim.60 Yet others spoke of a perceived lack of cohesion within French society and the problems of a heightened sense of suspicion. Many ordinary citizens stated that revolutionary family legislation had sewn discord into families, while medical professionals became interested in the operations of fear in the wake of the Terror.61 Certainly it is understandable how the events of 1793–94—the escalating levels of violence, the prevalence of denunciation, and the laws requiring suspicion—led individuals to feel estranged from one another. The limitations on associational life cannot have helped either, as
the state attempted to overtake civil society. Further, citizens had to contend with the successive collapse of two models of social organization—the hierarchical one and the sentimental one. For centuries, love, either vertical and corporate or horizontal and individualistic, had been the bond of society. But if the polity was founded on interest, citizens had no tie that connected them to one another. The sentimentalist individualism of the earlier stages of the Revolution gave way to an individualism evacuated of sentiment.

The years between 1789 and 1794 saw the rise, transformation, and liquidation of a sentimentalist politics. The events of the Revolution unleashed emotions—from love to fear—and attempted to inculcate them in the citizens of a regenerated France. But in the end, basing politics on the emotions was impossible. Love could not overcome the ideological divisions that the Revolution unleashed, and the vision of a sentimentalist polity opened the door to too much instability. The course of revolutionary politics destroyed trust and made connecting with others a dangerous and difficult prospect. The men and women of the post-revolutionary era would struggle with this legacy of suspicion, the problems of factionalism and denunciation, and the question of how to imagine social cohesion in a world of liberty and equality but not fraternity.

THE NAPOLEONIC ERA AND THE SEARCH FOR AN ÉTATISTE ORDER

Like the men of Thermidor, Napoleon confronted the problem of social atomization as he attempted to solidify his rule. He worked to ease ideological tensions and placed high society under his direction by creating a new elite, annexing associational life and salon culture, and heavily policing sociability. Yet this last effort compounded the problem of distrust and complicated the project of social reconstruction. In the end, what Napoleon offered was an étatiste model of social organization and post-revolutionary reconstruction, one where the state directed high society and social relations for its own benefit.

In his memoirs, Guizot described how “social pacification” marked the period between 1799 and 1815. If he had little praise for Napoleon, he spoke with no small amount of nostalgia for the relative tranquility of this era. Indeed, historians generally agree that ideological passions cooled (but did not disappear) during this regime. For example, Napoleon dismantled the republican political apparatus, and most republicans either supported his regime or did
not openly oppose it. He was less successful with those on the right, as many aristocrats were estranged from his regime. If ideological divisions and opposition remained, they were not at the forefront in the way they had been during the Revolution and became again during the Restoration. The relative lack of discord was even apparent among Napoleon’s closest collaborators. In the words of Isser Woloch, “In the years of the Consulate, at least, the forced depoliticization created a climate where men of talent and experience but of differing opinions could work together, listen to each other, debate in good faith, and marshal their eloquence and expertise to reach consensus with the first consul over the thorniest of issues.” Other organs of government saw an even more definitive silencing of political passions as Napoleon banned debate in the Corps législatif in order to avoid an airing of ideological divides.

Napoleon also wanted to create a new social order, and in a speech to the Conseil d’État, he spoke of the work of the Revolution and the needs of a new France: “There is a government, there are powers; but what is the rest of the nation? Grains of sand. . . . We are scattered, without any system, without union, without contact.” He stated that he wanted to sow “blocks of granite in the soil of France.” Napoleon’s terms bore a strong resemblance to the words Tallien used to describe the effects of the Terror and are strikingly similar to the discourse of individualism that became prominent during the Restoration and July Monarchy. In all these cases, the Revolution spread anomie into society and left citizens fundamentally estranged from one another. Napoleon’s solution, though, was characteristically dirigiste as he proposed to bring French society together through new government institutions, including lycées and a strengthened administration.

Central to this effort to reestablish French society was the creation of a new elite based around the model of state service and an elite sociability that was to be “an instrument of a social policy designed to bolster the stability and legitimacy of his regime.” The Légion d’honneur and the imperial nobility were designed to fuse the elite of the Old Regime with that of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. Associational life served this same purpose of bridging the divide between the old and the new France. Freemasonry had a particular importance during the Napoleonic regime. It received official recognition from the state, and many of those close to Napoleon held high positions as Masons, including two of his brothers. But Napoleon also placed civic organizations under close surveillance, and article 291 of the Penal Code
stated that the state had to authorize all organizations with more than twenty members. If the regime was more permissive toward associations than that of the radical Revolution, civil society was to serve the ends of the state.

The Napoleonic era also saw the revival of court life and an attempt to appropriate salon culture, efforts that gave some women political roles. Claire de Rémusat, Charles de Rémusat’s mother, was a salonnière whose task was to bring the old and new elites together. Related to the comte de Vergennes, she married a member of the Provençal nobility; both she and her husband were attached to the imperial court. With Napoleon’s backing and financial support, she maintained a salon for writers and artists, including Chateaubriand. Napoleon also credited Josephine in his efforts at elite fusion. In his memoirs, he stated that she helped him reach out to aristocrats of the Old Regime: “Without my wife, I never would have been able to have any natural connection to this party.” Napoleon, though known for his aversion to women’s political engagement, recognized that women could build support for his regime. In certain respects, Josephine’s functions were similar to those of the women at the court of Versailles, as she was an intermediary between the monarch and noble factions. Yet, whereas the women of the Old Regime helped aristocrats find favor with the king, Josephine did the opposite—she helped her husband facilitate contact with and find support among those otherwise distant from his rule.

Some of the regime’s attempts to control elite sociability complicated interpersonal relations. The imperial court imposed constraints that were similar to those at Versailles. Jean Jacques Régis de Cambacérès, one of Napoleon’s chief collaborators, stated that imperial courtiers lived with “the naive fear . . . that if we were lacking in the slightest thing we would receive a reproach”; consequently, the court was characterized by a “silence that we kept about everything.” Once again, the monarch’s watchful gaze created an atmosphere of fear and prevented individuals from connecting in any meaningful way with one another. Observers also credited Napoleon’s efforts to monitor high society with creating a sense of estrangement among elites. The regime oversaw the considerable expansion of state surveillance, although for centuries the government had spied on its citizens. Napoleon and Fouché, his most prominent spymaster, established the administrative structure of the modern police state, one inherited by the Restoration and July Monarchy. Under Napoleon, spies went to theaters, cafés, secret societies, salons, and events such as balls and the races at Longchamps. He also had informers who
circulated in high society, including Madame de Genlis and Joseph Fiévée. As a result, speaking freely at a social event was a risky proposition. Salon-goers lived in fear as they attempted to determine who among them was a police agent and whether what they said was being relayed to the government. The idea that the over-policing of society was troubling social relations became part of the black legend of Napoleon. Thus the anti-Napoleonic propagandist Jean Baptiste Couchery wrote in his *Le Moniteur secret; ou, Tableau de la cour de Napoleon, de son caractère, et de celui de ses agens* that the term “tyrant” was “a word that one hardly dared speak in the silence of a retreat or in the confidence of friendship because one is so surrounded by spies and denouncers.” As at the court, elites resorted to silence to evade the gaze of the state. Couchery’s opposition to the regime undoubtedly motivated his discussion of the deleterious effects of state surveillance. Yet even Fouché spoke in much the same way about his handiwork. He said that police spying resulted in “no more communication, no more expansion, no more trust between citizens. It was only inside families and in the bosom of friendship that public unhappiness dared to express itself with smothered voices.” Here, only the closest of personal ties could withstand the pressure of an intrusive state.

There was one realm in which the regime relied on love as a force for public cohesion: the military. For Napoleon, his generals, and his soldiers, love united the army. Military thinkers understood that close ties between soldiers promoted unity within the ranks and led men to become better fighters. Indeed, intense sentiment tied Napoleon to some of his chief subordinates, including Marshal Lannes, Marshal Duroc, and General Junot, while rank-and-file members of the army often spoke of the mutual fondness between themselves and the emperor. For these men, too, friendship was a crucial survival strategy. During the disastrous Russian campaign, having a friend was sometimes the difference between life and death. Friends shared food with each other, cared for each other when wounded, and provided crucial forms of emotional support.

In many ways, then, the regime’s attitude toward high society was an attempt to solve the problems the Revolution had posed. It tried to heal—or at the very least silence—the ideological divisions engendered during the previous decade, to create an elite that would reconcile the old and the new France and end the perceived atomization of French society. Unity and order came from the state and not from the emotions (with the significant exception of the army), and the regime generally saw a retreat from the use of sentiment as a force for public cohesion.
The Sentimental Education of the Political

POST-REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETY AND THE PROBLEM OF INDIVIDUALISM

In the aftermath of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, French thinkers were preoccupied with the question of how the Revolution had changed France. Among those who set out to investigate the nature of this society, a chorus of authors repeated the same set of ideas: the Revolution had destroyed French society. Now France was nothing but a collection of individuals. 78

The first writers to discuss individualism as a problem were conservatives and Catholics during the Restoration. They decried the state of a nation that had turned its back on hierarchy, tradition, and order in favor of individual rights and liberties. For them, the twin evils of democracy and irreligion, as embodied in the Revolution, had destroyed all social bonds. Thus an 1825 article in Le Mémorial catholique stated that “individualism is a sore on the social body and one of the consequences of revolutions,” and that the Revolution had “divided all interests and broken all ties of religion, the state, and the family.” 79 As a result, the citizens of France were now entirely preoccupied with their own selves. 80 Other thinkers and politicians on the far-right, including Chateaubriand and Joseph de Maistre, expressed a concern about an isolating self-absorption that seemed to be so characteristic of their day. Indeed, de Maistre has been credited with coining the term “individualism.” 81 In his mind, this word had wholly negative connotations, for it suggested a world of too much freedom, one in which division and anomie reigned.

In this respect at least, de Maistre was within the mainstream of early nineteenth-century thought. Indeed, in this period the word “individualism” was not associated so much with freedom or self-development but atomization. Its closest synonym was “egoism.” 82 During the Restoration and July Monarchy, liberals also spoke of the pervasive anomie of the day. The doctrinaire theorist and politician Pierre Paul Royer-Collard stated that France was a “society reduced to dust” as a result of the Revolution. 83 This was also a theme of Alexis de Tocqueville’s work. In Democracy in America, he maintained that democratic societies (which France was inevitably becoming) lacked a bond to connect free and equal citizens. In his mind, the danger was that individuals would retreat to the private sphere and disengage from the wider social and civic order. 84 Socialists of the July Monarchy also took up this discourse of social dissolution to demonstrate the need to build a new, more communitarian society. For these authors, the problem was that the Revolution had created a socioeconomic order based on competition, not cooperation. Thus, in 1831, the Saint-Simonist philosopher Pierre Leroux echoed
Royer-Collard by stating, “Society has been reduced to dust because men are no longer connected to one another, because nothing unites them, because man is stranger to man.”

In large measure, the problem of individualism was a French problem. German, American, and British authors wrote about individualism as well, but they often (although not always) saw it in positive terms instead of the far more pessimistic French vision. German thinkers typically associated this concept with self-expression and self-development, while American ones thought in terms of free markets and democracy. In turn, British uses of the term often referred to religious nonconformity. Such positive connotations were undoubtedly due to the strength of specific traditions, whether Romanticism in Germany or the history of religious dissent in Britain.

In contrast, in France, individualism was seen as the work of the Revolution. It was thus regarded as fundamentally new, and the product of political turmoil and even violence. French thinkers also perceived that individualism was about a lack and tied it to the weakness of civil society in the early nineteenth century. The specifically French anxiety about individualism and social dissolution also arose out of the successive failed efforts to imagine a new social order. From the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth, French citizens saw three distinct models of social organization: the corporate and hierarchical, the sentimental, and the Napoleonic vision of a society under the government’s tutelage. Going back to the first was impracticable; corporate groups and legal privilege no longer existed. The sentimental model had proved to be both dangerous and impossible during the Terror, while the Napoleonic one had little appeal. The post-Napoleonic regimes also evinced less desire to direct social relations and reconstruct society around the state. The Revolution thus left individuals as the only actors on the scene while making it difficult to imagine that there was any bond between citizens. Ultimately, this gets to the heart of the problem of post-revolutionary individualism and the legacy of the Revolution for the French social order. Men and women had friends and family members; elites circulated in the dense world of high society. Following Tocqueville’s line of thought, though, what was lacking was any sense of public cohesion—and it is to this problem that the next chapter turns.