

76-30,275

TENENBAUM, Susan Sara, 1947-
THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT OF
MME. DE STAËL.

City University of New York, Ph.D., 1976
Political Science, general

Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

© COPYRIGHT BY
SUSAN SARA TENENBAUM

1976

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT OF MME. DE STAËL

by

SUSAN SARA TENENBAUM

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in Political Science in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1976

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

June 1, 1976

date

Melvin Richter

Chairman of Examining Committee

June 1, 1976

date

Martin Fleisher

Executive Officer

Professor Melvin Richter

Professor Martin Fleisher

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the course of my doctoral studies I have had the good fortune to work closely with Professor Melvin Richter whose wise counsels, intellectual generosity, friendship and warm encouragement have placed me forever in his debt. Professor Martin Fleisher has my deep gratitude for his insightful criticism and encouragement of my work, as well as for his unfailing graciousness.

During my stay in Paris, Mlle. Simone Balayé afforded me the benefits of her hospitality and her scholarship. I have learned much from conversations with M. André Lang, Comte Robert de Luppé, Professor Ellen Moers, and Professor Jean Starobinski.

The staff of the CUNY Graduate School Library has generously rendered invaluable assistance. I also wish to acknowledge the courtesy extended to me by the staffs of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire de Genève, and the Bibliothèque Cantonale de Vaud. The staff of the Rockville Centre Public Library has my special thanks for its congenial support and cooperation during the writing of the dissertation.

My mother's tangible contribution to this dissertation is gratefully recorded: she shared with me the chore of typing the final manuscript. Her intangible contribution remains well beyond my capacity to acknowledge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I: BIOGRAPHY.....	5
CHAPTER 2: PROLEGOMENA.....	51
CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL PROGRESS.....	73
CHAPTER 4: POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY	
Mme. de Staél' Adaptation of Montesquieu...	136
Thermidorian Republic.....	193
England.....	238
Despotism	272
Italy.....	301
Germany.....	318
Russia.....	333
CHAPTER 5: REVOLUTION.....	368
CONCLUSION.....	430
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	435

INTRODUCTION

Mme. de Staël has not been a neglected figure in intellectual history. As a critic and novelist, she has earned an entry in most literary anthologies and has been the subject of numerous books, treatises and monographs. Biographers have been drawn irresistibly to her for less esoteric reasons: her famed erotic life and legendary political struggle with Napoleon. Among students of political thought she has fared less well, however. Attention to her writings has been negligible, despite the fact that the major portion of her oeuvre is devoted to the critical study of social and political institutions. Mme. de Staël's failure to attract scholarly attention may be attributed to a number of causes. Her outspoken defense of the bourgeoisie, besides seriously compromising her theoretical vision, has made her a sinister and unfashionable figure in the Marxist dominated field of Revolutionary studies. Alternatively, she has been dismissed as a political propagandist and polemicist whose treatises offer little of permanent value. Still more damaging is the charge that Mme. de Staël's writings are fatally flawed by logical inconsistencies, ambiguous arguments and contradictory perspectives.

During her own age, however, the impact of Mme. de

Staël's writings was considerable, and not simply in terms of their immediate effect on the political situation of the day. She was, as her biographer Albert Sorel suggests, the "muse" of Restoration liberalism.¹ Thus Lamartine assessed most generously that quality of eclecticism that later critics have been less eager to applaud: "Her genius was like an antique chorus, in which all the great voices of the drama unite in one tumultuous concord."² Following Lamartine's counsel, I shall not let Mme. de Staël's intellectual inconsistencies obscure her achievements nor shall I dismiss them as irrelevant to my concerns. Rather I shall observe that the tensions in her thought open up several fruitful avenues of inquiry: they focus our attention on her predicament as a thinker at the crossroads of eighteenth and nineteenth century cultures, as well as illuminate the disparate strands of thought obscured by all-encompassing terms like "Enlightenment" or "Romanticism"; they compel us to examine the delicate relationship between political theory and the practice of politics; and above all, they reveal an insatiably inquisitive mind eager to assimilate wide-ranging currents of ideas and apply them to problems unique to her revolutionary era.

As a theorist, Mme. de Staël's contributions reflect a broad range of concerns. She devoted considerable attention to the question of historical change conceived in terms of the paradigm of progress. To this well-worn eighteenth century theme she brought new perspectives, not the least important of which was her investigation of the historical evolution of

the family. Her analysis of political progress exerted a profound influence on Restoration historians like Guizot. As a political sociologist, Mme. de Staël formulated the most sophisticated models of free society since Montesquieu, whose constructs she sought to adapt to the post-revolutionary era. Her contrasting model of despotism -- derived from the experience of Napoleonic France -- substantially revised Montesquieu's older model to offer remarkable anticipations of twentieth century theories of totalitarianism. Her studies of Germany, Italy and Russia introduced the French public to unfamiliar cultures and fresh intellectual perspectives. Lastly, Mme. de Staël offered one of the earliest full-scale interpretations of the French Revolution.

These three areas of Mme. de Staël's theoretical interest -- historical progress, political sociology, and revolution -- define the contours of this dissertation. My investigation of these topics will be preceded by two introductory chapters: a biography and an analytical prolegomena.

NOTES

1Albert Sorel, Mme. de Staël (Paris: Hachette, 1907), p. 197.

2Alphonse de Lamartine, History of the Girondists (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1849), I, pp. 198-99.

CHAPTER I:
BIOGRAPHY

The present chapter launches this inquiry with a short biography of Mme. de Staël. It stresses no single mode of analysis, since to interpret Mme. de Staël's teaching as the exclusive product of her social environment, intellectual milieu, political ambitions, or psychological makeup is to disregard the very complexities that characterize her life and thought. The dangers of adopting a single line of approach are illustrated by reference to George Sorel's chapter on Mme. de Staël in his The Illusions of Progress.¹ Sorel seeks to relate the intellectual predominance of the idea of historical progress to the rise of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century. From this perspective, he depicts Mme. de Staël as a representative of the ascendant social class whose material interests ineluctably led her to espouse the concept. Now it is quite true that Mme. de Staël consciously defended the interests of the Third Estate and enlisted the concept of progress to this end. Yet this strategy does not exhaust the content of her thought, and indeed does real injury to the complexity of her position. Consequently, Sorel passes over Mme. de Staël's ties to the nobility, as well as ignores other com-

peting modes of historical legitimation (such as the appeal to precedent) also present in her writings. Nor does Sorel's rigid perspective allow him to appreciate the relativist strand in her thought which led her to champion cultural pluralism against the "progressive" ideal of a universally valid middle-class society. Lastly, Mme. de Staël's sexual self consciousness as an "exceptional" woman caused her to fear the spread of middle-class morality with its cult of domesticity and narrow sexual attitudes. Such considerations lead to the conclusion that no single mode of analysis is sufficient to explain the quality of Mme. de Staël's mind. Thus this biography will not focus on any one aspect of her upbringing. Instead it will seek to illuminate the various social, political, intellectual and psychological forces that contributed to shape her perspectives.

On April 22, 1766, eleven years before Louis XVI was to appoint her father Director-General of Finance, Germaine Necker was born in Paris at the Hotel Leblanc. That the date of her birth should be combined with a reference to her father's career is only fitting, for it was Jacques Necker to whom Mme. de Staël was to owe the first and greatest of her intellectual debts. Necker was a Genevean-born Protestant of Germanic descent. His father, Karl, a celebrated mathematician at the Academy of Geneva and a former tutor to George I of England, had, through the combination of a judicious marriage to the daughter of Geneva's First Syndic and his own scholarly accomplish-

ments, been granted burger's rights to the city. Unlike his father, Jacques elected to pursue a career in finance, though he never abandoned an early interest in literature and philosophy. At the age of eighteen, Necker was transferred to the Paris branch of the bank of Issac Vernet; he so assiduously devoted himself to his duties that, fourteen years later, he was named as the sole director of the Bank of Thelussion (the successor to the Bank Vernet). Through a series of astute speculative maneuvers involving the sale of French and English treasury bonds, the wheat famine of 1764, and the liquidation of French holdings in Canada, Necker had become, in the words of George Kelly, "an exceedingly rich bourgeois."² In 1768, four years after his marriage to Suzanne Curchod, he was appointed Geneva's resident minister in Paris; the following year he took over the directorship of the French East India Company. Necker's meteoric rise public acclaim as Finance Minister, until his forced resignation and exile in 1781, left an indelible impression on the young Germaine. At the age of fifteen, she extolled him as, "la plus noble des âmes ... il est environé de la puissante majesté du genie."³; throughout her career eulogies to Necker would assume a prominent place in her writings. On a more abstract level, his image nourished that strand in Mme. de Staël's thought which emphasized the role of the individual leader and historical actor.

Suzanne Curchod, born in the parsonage of Crassier, shared her future husband's Swiss origins. She was the daughter of an impoverished Presbyterian pastor; on her mother's

side, she claimed ancestral ties to the petite noblesse (throughout her married life, Mme. Necker actively sought legal confirmation of her noble status). Tutored by her father, she had, by the age of sixteen, become remarkably proficient in both the humanities and the sciences. Her intellect and striking good-looks assured her popularity. Edward Gibbon paid her court. She was elected president of the Académie des Eaux ou de la Poudrière, in the neighboring city of Lausanne. There, her austere Calvinist upbringing was tempered by the quasi-deistic cultural theology practiced by the members of the Academy. Orphaned at twenty-six, she was obliged to provide for her own support as a companion to Mme. Vermenoux, a wealthy young widow, whom she accompanied to Paris. There she met and married Jacques Necker. Henceforth, Mme. Necker enlisted her talents to advance her husband's career. To nurture his reputation in philosophical circles, she founded a salon on the rue de Cléry which, over the next several years, she developed into one of the most celebrated intellectual meeting places in the capital. Among the habitués of Mme. Necker's salon were Diderot, d'Alembert, Grimm, Suard, Marmontel, Buffon, and the Abbés Raynal, Galiani, and Morellet.

Mme. Necker's salon contributed much to her young daughter's education. At an early age, Germaine became a regular member of her mother's select drawing-room society; indeed, until her twelfth year, she was to be deprived of the companionship of her peers and allowed only the exclusive company of the philosophes. Within this rarefied intellectual milieu,

Germaine Necker assimilated the cross-currents of ideas and mastered the dazzling conversational style that would serve her throughout her career. Her remarkable precocity is attested to in an account by Catherine Hubert:

Après le dîner, il vint beaucoup de monde. Chacun en s'approchant de Mme. Necker disait un mot à sa fille ... Elle répondait à tout avec aisance et grâce; on se plaisait à l'attaquer, à l'embarrasser, à exciter cette petite imagination qui se montrait déjà si brillante. Les hommes les plus marquants par leur esprit étaient ceux qui s'attachaient davantage à la faire parler.⁴

Germaine's formal education, austere⁵ly presided over by Mme. Necker, was intensive, though not exceptional for an intellectual of the period. By the age of eleven, she was fluent in Latin and knew some English; and undated devoir written in a child's hand and addressed to the question "Quel est le meilleur des gouvernements?", prophetically reveals a preference for le gouvernement mixte; by fifteen, she had annotated a copy of De l'esprit des lois. In literature, she was attracted to the sensibilité of Rousseau and Richardson, and patterned her early writings in their style; and thirteen, she drew the following rebuke from her mother:

Your style is rather high-flown. Do not go so much beyond yourself to praise and caress me. This shows a want of taste, common enough at your age. When one has lived longer one sees that the true way to please and to interest people is to describe one's thought exactly, without affectation and without display.⁵

Her religious training, of especial concern to Mme. Necker who professed an equal abhorrence of Catholics and materialists, rigorously conformed to the tenets of Swiss Calvinism.

A hypersensitive child, emotionally over-wrought by her mother's starchy severity, her concentrated regime of studies, and her force-fed maturity, Germaine Necker suffered a nervous collapse at the age of thirteen. On the order of Dr. Tronchin, Voltaire's celebrated physician, she was removed from her mother's exacting supervision and sent to the family's country estate at St. Ouen in the company of her only childhood friend, Catherine Huber. In the congenial atmosphere of the rural retreat, Germaine recovered her health and staged her first play, aptly titled Les inconvenients de Paria. It was also during this period that she developed an extraordinary attachment to her father. To escape the rigors of public office, Necker often visited St. Ouen where he indulged his affection-starved daughter with the tenderness she required. Her adoration of him bordered on idolatry; her relationship with her mother rapidly deteriorated into an intense rivalry for Necker's affections.

Following Necker's dismissal from office in 1781, the family retired to St. Ouen, where the former Director-General of Finance was assured by a steady flow of visitors of the unflinching sympathy and support of the nation. These accolades only served to reinforce Germaine's already unbounded esteem of Necker. Thus, she rebelled violently against a proposed marriage to William Pitt (who had recently resigned as Chancellor of the Exchequer and was suitably Protestant), since it would necessitate her residence in England, away from her father. In 1784, Necker purchased the Chateau de Coppet, and there waited out his return to power. When the subject of

marriage was again raised, Germaine, exhausted by the confrontation over Pitt, passively acquiesced to the choice of her parents, the Swedish ambassador to Paris, Eric Magnus, Baron Staël de Holstein. She entered into the union with few illusions; the Baron de Staël was handsome and possessed of a courtly charm, yet ineffectual and intellectually mediocre. Of him, his future wife wrote:

M. de Staël ... est un homme parfaitement honnête, incapable de dire, ni de faire une sottise, mais stérile et sans ressort, il ne peut rendre malheureuse que parce qu'il n'ajoutera pas, au bonheur et non parce qu'il le troublera.

The frustrations borne of this mariage de convenance would nourish a permanent strand of Mme de Staël's thought: the example of her parents, the lessons instilled by her literary heroines, her Calvinist upbringing and middle-class ideals all inflated her expectations of married life and magnified the emptiness of her own union. In her writings, she would compulsively examine the institution of marriage, analyzing its various modes, its role within the larger framework of the state, and, from an intimate perspective, its viability for the woman of genius.

Germaine Necker was wed to the Baron de Staël on January 14, 1786. The new ambassadress now presided over both the salon of her ailing mother and her own coterie at the Swedish embassy on the rue de Bac. Her efforts were almost entirely to marshaling support for her father's return to public office, an enterprise which took on greater urgency following the lettre de cachet issued to Necker in April of 1787. Her des-

patches to King Gustavus III of Sweden are her most significant writings of the period; they contain, in addition to the predictable testimonials to Necker's virtue, lively accounts of Court intrigues and Parisian gossip, as well as carefully argued cases for religious toleration and the abolition of slavery. It was during this period, too, that Mme. de Staël completed her first essay of major importance, the Lettres sur les écrits et le caractère de J.J. Rousseau, published in 1788. At the time of its composition, the works of Rousseau were enjoying a great vogue in France. Rousseau shared her Swiss heritage and had been a personal acquaintance of both her parents, as well as an intimate of François Coindet, Necker's secretary.⁸ Others in Mme. de Staël's circle also knew Rousseau well, and her essay often cites their first-hand testimony. Moreover Mme. de Staël considered herself, in many respects, Rousseau's spiritual disciple; her essay was intended to be, in George Poulet's words, a "critique d'admiration ... une assimilation du sujet admirateur au sujet admiré."⁹ Yet Mme. de Staël's appreciation of her master was not wholly uncritical, and her essay is more complex than Poulet's assessment suggests. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that Mme. de Staël's allegiance was, in fact, divided among several conflicting eighteenth century traditions. Thus she could endorse Rousseau's ethic of natural sympathy, while complaining of his alleged devaluation of reason and displaying a cosmopolitanism anathema to the Genevan recluse. When not openly critical, her reading of Rousseau was often selective or ideologically distorted. Her

discussion of the second Discours failed to mention Rousseau's attack on the origins of private property, and she disengenuously argued that, in the Contrat social, Rousseau professed a preference for monarchy based on general consent. For reasons of the tensions it embodied, the modes of argument enlisted, and the themes advanced, Lettres sur Rousseau stands as a fertile anticipation of Mme. de Staël's mature thought.

Rousseau's own writings provide the framework of the essay. The opening letter examined three works: the first and second Discours and the Lettre sur les spectacles. Her discussion of the two Discours focused on Rousseau's conception of progress. Like Voltaire, she subscribed to the position that Rousseau was a primitivist; she criticized him for portraying only the negative consequences of progress, for failing to discriminate among its various spheres, and for failing to perceive that man's desire for knowledge is innate. Nonetheless she applauded Rousseau's moral conviction and recommended his works for their cautionary value and inspired eloquence. The second letter was consecrated to the Nouvelle Heloise, which Mme. de Staël examined from the standpoint of its moral utility. The value of the novel, she maintained, "est dans son effet plus que dans son plan". If Rousseau was wrong to depict Julie's indiscretions, he nevertheless could arouse in his readers "l'enthousiasme de vertu" through his intimate grasp of the workings of the human heart. As a moralist, he rightly perceived that man's natural senti-

ments are the source of his virtues; that love is the most virtuous of the passions; and that melancholy is the disposition appropriate to the human condition. Lastly he properly revered marriage as "le lien auquel nature nous destine!". The third letter was consecrated to the Émile, which she considered more significant for its individual insights than for its over-all program. She especially admired the religious teaching of the Vicar Savoyard, though deemed it inferior to Necker's own De l'importance des opinions religieuses. Mme. de Staël's severest criticism of the work was directed against the education of Sophie which, she maintained, equipped Émile's bride only for a life of weakness and dependency. The fourth letter, a highly critical exposition of the Contrat social, attacked Rousseau's injunction against representative government, labeling his recommendations utopian and impractical. Against Rousseau's perfectionist blueprint, Mme. de Staël argued for the politics of the possible as represented by the tradition of Montesquieu and culminating in the statesmanship of Necker. She exhorted the États Généraux to rally to Necker as their "ange tutelaire." The fifth letter was devoted to Rousseau's musical compositions and writings on botany; the sixth letter, based on the Confessions and the testimony of Rousseau's peers, examines the character of the Genevan philosopher.

Mme. de Staël continued to operate in Necker's shadow from the time of his triumphant recall to office in August of 1788 to his unlamented retirement in September of 1790. If her literary output during this period was meager, her

activities on her father's behalf were intense. Throughout his career, Necker had provoked the enmity of the royalists who regarded his ideas on public credit and representative institutions as subversive to the monarchy;¹⁰ this hostility reached a peak in 1789, with the Comte d'Artois denouncing Necker as "un second Cromwell" and demanding his ouster before the convening of the États Généraux. Mme. de Staël devoted herself to the conduct of Necker's defense. In her capacity as ambassadress, she futilely pleaded her father's case before Gustavus III, who was soon to emerge as the leader of the counterrevolution:

Il faut que tous les soins de mon père tendent à relever l'autorité du roi. Si le pouvoir exécutif ne lui appartient pas en entier, si les troupes ne lui obéissent pas, ce pays est perdu. Quand un gouvernement subsiste depuis longtemps, il a l'apparence qu'il est nécessaire. C'est comme les règles de l'arithmétique, dont on trouve la preuve en les renversant. Jamais mon père n'a formé le projet d'en détruire les bases.¹¹

The hub of Mme. de Staël's public relations operation was her salon on the rue de Bac. There she gave receptions for deputies representing all shades of opinion within the constitutional Left, including Malouet, the brothers Lameth, Sieyès, Mounier, Lally-Tollendal, Jaucourt, Lafayette and Barnave. The members of her inner circle -- Guibert, Talleyrand, Mathieu de Montmorency, and Narbonne -- were liberal aristocrats of ancient lineage. When the question of the future constitution was taken up in the National Assembly during August of 1789, Mme. de Staël used her salon as a platform for promoting Necker's views on the necessity of

adopting English institutions. In this effort, her most outspoken critics were no longer the royalists, whose political ascendancy was eclipsed by the course of events, but those liberals whose abhorrence of caste privilege prevented them from accepting any sort of institutional accomodation of the nobility. Foremost among these deputies was the Abbe Sieyès, a disciple of Rousseau and Mably, who propounded a scheme for the strict separation of powers between a unicameral legislature representing the unified national will and a royal executive without power of veto. Against the minimal constitutionalism of Sieyès and his supporters, Mme. de Staël, as Necker's agent, rallied to that wing of the Assembly which had urged the adoption of a more complex institutional structure. The proposals of deputies like Mounier, Malcuet and Lally-Tollendal (with individual variations in detail, they advocated a balance of powers between a bicameral legislature and an executive, linked by a system of checks that would include a royal veto) owed much to the writings of Montesquieu and his disciples Blackstone and deLolme, as well as to American models like John Adams' Defense of the Constitution of the United States.¹² Adherents of this tradition of thought were dubbed "Anglomaniacs" by their opponents (although, as R.R. Palmer correctly argues, the appellation disengenuously ignored their debt to American examples¹³), a label with sinister connotations in the wake of the American Revolution. Mme. de Staël welcomed the epithet, however. Like Necker she maintained the the interests of the nation would best be served by the adoption of English institutions. Against the popular

charge that the House of Lords was a seat of corruption and bastion of privilege incompatible with the principles of the Revolution, Mme. de Staël submitted that only a hereditary upper chamber with membership drawn from ancient lineage could reconcile the aristocracy to the new regime and confer upon it the advantages of legitimacy rooted in tradition. Butressing Necker's efforts, she urged that the executive be empowered with a royal veto. As revealed in her correspondence Mme. de Staël assiduously promoted these schemes in her salon. Nonetheless a letter to her husband dated October 19, 1790 no doubt exaggerated the extent of her efforts, "Tu n'a pas d'idée du mouvement que je me donne pour être à moi seule une assemblée nationale entière."¹⁵ Mme. de Staël's pleas for a compromise with tradition, while eminently reasonable, were, given the configuration of forces mapped against her, politically unrealistic: the majority of the tiers état supported Sieyès' sweeping repudiation of the past, while royalists had no intention of compromising with the future. Throughout Mme. de Staël's public career, the dilemma of "middlingness"¹⁶ would continue to plague her.

Failing to keep apace with the Revolution, Necker resigned his office in September 1790 and bitterly retreated to Coppet where he set about writing a defense of his administration. His daughter returned with him, bemoaning his lost reputation, but already displaying an independence and flexibility of mind that would eventually lead to a temporary break with Necker's rigid political views. Thus despite her father's opposition to the measure,

Mme. de Staël accepted the nationalization of church properties as economically sound and, in a letter of October 1790,¹⁷ urged her husband to invest in the expropriated lands.

Unable to bear the solitude of Coppet, Mme. de Staël returned to her salon on the rue de Bac in January 1791. For the first time in her career, her activities would not be directly in the service of Necker's political fortunes. Against the rising tide of extremism, her energies were devoted to consolidating the position of the moderates, whose ranks were badly splintered between Condorcet and Brissot on the Left and the Triumvirate of Barnave, Duport and A. Lament on the Right. The situation of the moderates was precarious; while émigré aristocrats threatened to restore the Old Regime by means of armed foreign intervention, dissatisfaction with the restrictive policies of the bourgeois National Assembly had given rise, among large numbers of "passive" citizens, to a proliferation of radical revolutionary clubs demanding egalitarian reforms incompatible with the interests of the dominant tiers état. Increasingly menacing activities of the Jacobins and later the Cordelier Club, prompted passage, in the spring of 1791, of various measures directed at inhibiting assaults on the newly won prerogatives of the bourgeoisie.¹⁸ For Mme. de Staël, the immediate task was to arrest the course of the Revolution without sacrificing its gains, defined as the establishment of a clearly structured constitutional monarchy, the political enfranchisement of the bourgeoisie, and the guarantee of civil liberties for all citizens. To accomplish these

ends, the moderates would have to close ranks and agree on a firm political program. Casting herself in the role of arbiter, Mme. de Staël established her salon as a meeting place for leaders of the various moderate factions, with the hope of reconciling their disparate positions behind a single standard. To influence opinion on a broader scale, she used Suard's newspaper, Les Indépendans, as a platform for her views. In April she published an essay entitled "A quels signes peut-on connoître quelle est l'opinion de la majorité de la nation?" in which she deftly employed revolutionary rhetoric in support of moderate goals. The essay, which equated the "volonté permante et générale" with the desire for order, liberty and repose, urged "les royalistes et les républicains" to assert their common allegiance to these values against the subversive assaults of the Jacobins and counterrevolutionaries.

Mme. de Staël became actively involved in the projects of the Feuillant Club, a group of moderates organized as a breakaway from the Jacobins following the angry republican demonstrations on the Champ de Mars (July 17). The goal of the Feuillants was to revise the constitution in favor of a strengthened executive and bicameral legislature, facilitating the restoration of order and undercutting the demands of the emigres for a return to the Old Regime. These plans miscarried, however, owing to a general mistrust of the Triumvirate and intransigent right-wing opposition in the Assembly. The Constitution of 1791, ratified in September, provided for a unicameral legislature over which the King had a

suspensive veto, but no power of dissolution. As revealed in a letter to Nils von Rosenstein, it was a sharp disappointment to Mme. de Staël:

... je trouve la constitution de France détestable. Elle n'établit aucun équilibre. Si le roi a la majorité dans la seule chambre qui existe, il peut tout; s'il ne l'a pas, il ne peut rien. Que la constitution d'Angleterre est plus habilement combinée! ¹⁹

Mme. de Staël's most significant, if short-lived, accomplishment of the period was Narbonne's appointment as Minister of War in December 1791. In this, as well as in the subsequent conduct of his ministry, she played a decisive role. Only with great reluctance did Mme. de Staël commit herself to a pro-war policy as the last remaining hope of consolidating royal authority and checking the mounting offensives of extremists on both sides. A successful military campaign against reactionary foreign powers harboring the émigrés would, she reasoned, crush the threat of counterrevolution, while a central government strengthened by its control of the war machine could effectively act to contain the internal offensive of the Jacobins. Ultimately, a reinforced executive branch could be transformed into an "English style ministry which would make policy subject to legislative approval."²⁰ Narbonne, whose liaison with Mme. de Staël was at once romantic and political, was to be the instrument of such a strategy. Her intrigues on his behalf were prodigious. To widen the base of Narbonne's support, Mme. de Staël cultivated a tenuous alliance with the Brissotins, whose pro-war sympathies were motivated by the

contrasting objective of undermining the King's authority by exposing his cabals with foreign reactionaries. She played a considerable role in the missions of Talleyrand and Ségur, as well as in negotiations with the Duke of Brunswick. It was Mme. de Staël who drafted a major portion of Narbonne's memorandum of February 24 counseling Louis XVI to purge his Court of counterrevolutionaries and place his confidence in the propertied bourgeoisie, that class whose material stake in the social order dictated a policy of restraint. Narbonne's ministry fell victim to royalist intrigues in March, paving the way for the ascendancy of the Brissotins and dashing Mme. de Staël's hopes for arresting the leftward trend of the Revolution. Her political influence eclipsed and her life endangered, Mme. de Staël fled Paris to Coppet just prior to the September Massacres. Her last efforts were devoted to arranging for the escape of constitutionalist friends, including Narbonne, Mathieu de Montmorency, Lally-Tolendal and François Jaucourt.

Thus concluded Mme. de Staël's direct involvement in revolutionary politics until her return to Paris in 1795. She remained mired in domestic altercations over her liason with Narbonne until December 1792. Having given birth to Narbonne's son the previous month, Mme. de Staël left Switzerland to join her lover who was then living, along with other members of their circle, at Juniper Hall in Surrey, England, a mansion she had rented as a shelter for refugees from the Terror. Her stay in England was attended by a number of personal and political reverses. Narbonne, remorseful

over his role in events which culminated in the trial and execution of Louis XVI, placed the blame for the course of his political career on his intriguing mistress. Her reception by English society was no less chilly. The events of the Terror and the propeganda efforts of the émigrés having combined to create a climate of blanket hostility to the Revolution, Mme. de Staël and her circle fell victim to the indiscriminate suspicions of the English: they were shunned as perpetrators of the Revolution and Jacobin sympathizers. Nor was the respectability of the Juniperian colony enhanced by their unconventional living arrangements. Horace Walpole, who frowned on "unmarried couples," refused to receive them at Strawberry Hill and Fanny Burney was forced by her family to break off relations with the group. It was during this period that Mme. de Staël began work on De l'influence des passions, an essay in which she publicly nursed her emotional wounds as well as offered a political analysis of the Terror. She returned to Switzerland in June 1773, once again devoting her energy to the rescue of aristocratic friends imperiled by the Terror. In September she anonymously published Réflexions sur le procès de la reine, a plea to spare the life of Marie Antoinette on humanitarian grounds.

The following year, Mme. de Staël took up residence in Mezery, near Lausanne. The move proved decisive to her career, for it was there that she first made the acquaintance of Benjamin Constant. A Swiss Protestant, intellectually formed by the Scottish Enlightenment²¹ and gifted with remarkable eloquence, Constant immediately captured the atten-

tion of his future mistress. In him, Mme. de Staël discovered an ideal collaborator. Sharing his libertarian views, she introduced Constant to a career as a statesman and political theorist. With Constant at her side, she composed the Réflexions sur la paix, adressées à M. Pitt et aux Français in late 1794, a work intended to reconcile her with the new Thermidorian regime.²² The first section of the pamphlet, addressed to William Pitt as the leader of the coalition powers, called upon the allies to make peace with the Thermidorian Republic. Alluding to the ruinous consequences of continued warfare, she argued that 1) the French, although internally rent by political factionalism, were united behind a patriotic determination to resist foreign invasion and hence were militarily invincible, and 2) a continuing policy of war would only serve to strengthen the hand of the Jacobins, whose last remaining base of support was the redoubtable patriotism of the French in time of crisis. Her recommendation -- negotiate a peace settlement that will allow social order to be restored. Only with the normalization of political life could the counsels of peace and moderation prevail. The second half of the pamphlet was addressed to the French nation; it recalled the dangers of fanaticism and urged that the Revolution's gains be cemented by consolidating the ranks of the moderate propertied class. Mme. de Staël professed no abstract preference for any particular form of government; but whereas she had earlier defended the relative social advan-

tages of a constitutional monarchy, she now accepted a republic modeled on the United States as a viable alternative.

Mme. de Staël's declared acceptance of a republican regime was received with skepticism in the French capital. The Thermidorian press vilified her. Pointing an insinuating finger at her relations with prominent monarchists like Narbonne, republican journalists stridently depicted Mme. de Staël as an intrigant, plotting to overthrow the government and restore the monarchy. Indeed her character had been so discredited that M. de Staël, then in Paris to negotiate Swedish recognition of the French republic, attempted to postpone his wife's return, fearing that her presence might jeopardize his political standing. Undaunted by the attacks mounted against her, Mme. de Staël arrived in Paris, accompanied by Benjamin Constant and under the cover of her husband's diplomatic immunity, on May 25, 1795. On 15 prarial (June 3), she struck back at her accusers by publishing in Suard's Nouvelles politiques et étrangères an unequivocal declaration of her commitment to the republic:

Je déclare que je ne partage pas le préjugé qui ferait tenir à telle forme de constitution par des considérations étrangères au bonheur et à la volonté de la nation qui l'adopte; et que je souhaite sincèrement l'établissement de la république française sur les bases sacrées de la justice et de l'humanité, parcequ'il m'est démontré que, dans les circonstances actuelles, le gouvernement républicain peut seul donner du repos et de la liberté à la France. 25

Despite the fact that by this open declaration of support for the republic she broke with the views of intimate

friends like Mathieu de Montmorency as well as those of her father, Mme. de Stael's "conversion" appears to have been sincere. Her correspondence corroborates that her republicanism was not uniquely based on calculations of practical self-interest, but was also informed by a relativist theoretical posture. In a letter dated 5 May 1795, she spoke of the necessity of adapting one's perspective to given circumstances:

La constitution [1793] est impossible; et s'il y avait une royauté, elle n'arriverait que par une impulsion si forte que l'on ne s'arrêterait sûrement pas à ce que nous appelons le point juste. Je désire la République si je vis, si j'existe en vivant, comme le seul gouvernement qui puisse et vous convenir, et ne pas déshonorer le France.²⁴

Thus Mme. de Staël conceded that the moderate gains of the Revolution -- which she consistently regarded as the establishment of representative government, a propertied franchise, and constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties -- had now to be preserved within a republican framework.

Mme. de Staël's efforts to reinstate herself met with temporary success, due, in no small measure, to the carefully cultivated patronage of Thermidorian luminaries like Roederer and Barras. Her salon reopened, it once again attracted the leading politicians and publicists of the day. In addition to Roederer and Barras, its habitués included Boissy d'Anglas, Sieyès, Lajuinais, Suard, La Harpe, and Adrien Lezay-Marnésia. Initially absent from its ranks, however, were many former members of Mme. de Staël's circle -- men like Mallouet, Talleyrand and Mathieu

de Montmorency, prevented from returning to Paris by the anti-émigré laws passed by the Convention. With the assistance of Marie-Joseph Chenier, Mme. de Staël negotiated the repatriation of many such moderate royalists. She was unimpressed with the leadership of the Thermidorian Conventionnels, men of recent fortunes and low extraction, and hoped to secure places for members of her inner circle in the new Assembly. Consequently she objected strongly to the proposed decree of deux tiers, by which two-thirds of the deputies of the new legislature would be selected from among the members of the outgoing Convention, and enlisted Benjamin Constant to denounce the measure in the Nouvelles politiques (6,7, and 8 messidor). His letters won the unsolicited applause of ardent royalists, who openly invited Constant and his collaboratress to cooperate with them to restore the monarchy, and predictably kindled resentment among the republican Conventionnels. Mme. de Staël's intentions were further rendered suspect by her close friendships with members of the Clichy Club, an association of moderate and reactionary monarchists later described by one Directoral deputy as a "permanent conspiracy against the Republic."²⁵ In an effort to mollify republican hostility, Constant publicly reversed his position the following month in the Républicain française and authored a speech, delivered by the deputy Louvet, declaring that "without the Conventionnels, a republic would be impossible."²⁶

Despite the apparent recklessness of her behavior,

it was imperative that Mme. de Staël retain the favor of the Conventionals since, during this period, she had nurtured hopes of contributing to the framing of the Constitution of the Year III. Only four weeks after her arrival in Paris, Boissy d'Anglas, the rapporteur of the Comité des onze, had presented his Discours préliminaire, articulating a tentative framework for the new constitution to be reviewed by the Convention. In general, Mme. de Staël approved of the terms set by Boissy: she shared the view that the new regime must be protected against the extremes of conservative reaction and social democracy; that wealth constituted evidence of enlightenment and was the criterion of legitimate political leadership; that property rights must be defended by a restricted political franchise; that civil liberty was a sufficient condition of equal economic opportunity; and that the Revolution embodied positive gains, but was deflected from its original course and betrayed by the Terror.

With regard to the structure of government proposed by Boissy, Mme. de Staël's attitude was more critical. As presented in the Discours préliminaire, the Constitution would provide for a strict separation of powers among a bicameral legislature, composed of a Council of Five Hundred and a Council of Elders; a five member Directory; and a High Court of Justice. The object of this arrangement was to prevent a preponderance of power from accruing to any single branch of government. However, the total absence of any sys-

tem of checks and balances left the constitution with no legal means of dealing with possible conflicts between the several branches. On this issue, Mme. de Staël focused her principal criticism of the proposed constitution. True to the teachings of Montesquieu and Necker, she rejected the argument that a system of checks was inimical to the protection of political liberty. Her present position recalled her earlier stand with regard to the monarchical constitution of 1791. Only an executive armed with a suspensive veto could mitigate the potential danger of impulsive legislative action and, from a practical point of view, could hope to enlist the crucial political support of the moderate royalists who remained convinced of the need for a constitutionally strong and independent executive branch. Secondly, while Mme. de Staël championed the principle of a bicameral legislature, she insisted that the chambers be adequately differentiated: that the deputies of the lower chamber be subject to frequent election, while those of the upper chamber be assured life tenure and a permanent annuity.

As before, Mme. de Staël's proposals were theoretically sound but politically unrealizable in face of the prevailing prejudices against an "oligarchic" upper chamber and a potentially dictatorial veto. Indeed her ostensible compromise with "les circonstances actuelles" was not sufficient to allay suspicions that her sympathies were really monarchist. With her accustomed vigor, she set out to promote her arguments. Her salon, the gathering place of leading

Conventionnels during the constitutional debate, served as the nucleus of her campaign. As attested to by her opponent, Legendre, Mme. de Staël's efforts to convince the deputies of the wisdom of her views were prodigious:

... que les représentants du peuple dînent en famille, qu'ils dînent avec leurs collègues et leurs amis, mais qu'ils fuient ces banquets où l'on cherche à les corrompre. Il n'est pas un membre de cette assemblée qui n'ait reçu des invitations fréquentes d'aller chez cette femme dont je me défie ...²⁷

Her Réflexions sur la paix intérieure, composed during this period and containing her views on the veto and upper chamber, capped Mme. de Staël's political initiatives. The primary purpose of the essay was to marshal moderate support for the new republic (with or without her suggested constitutional revisions). The pamphlet, divided into two sections, addressed both groups of the bifurcated moderate camp: the constitutional monarchists and their republican counterparts. To the first group, she offered cogent reasons why the monarchy no longer constituted a salutary political option. Her arguments were summed up by the observation that, "La France peut s'arrêter dans la république; mais pour arriver à la monarchie mixte, il faut passer par le gouvernement militaire." The importance of the essay, however, lies in Mme. de Staël's attempt to found a consensual basis for the new regime by articulating a set of values common to moderates of both camps. This intention is clearly revealed in the chapter entitled, "Que les principes des républicains amis de l'ordre, sont absolument les memes que les principes des royalistes amis de la liberté."

The principles cited include liberty, property, repose, and constitutional government. An impassioned plea for enlightened leadership concluded the pamphlet.

Having failed to persuade the Conventionnels either of the wisdom of her proposals or of her loyalty to the republic, Mme. de Staël retreated to Mathieu de Montmorency's chateau outside of Paris for the period of the September elections. In a futile attempt to stave off the royalist uprising of Vendémiaire, she returned to the capital at the end of the month, only to find herself falsely accused of complicity in the aborted insurrection and forcibly expelled from France by the Committee of Public Safety. In the company of Constant and her father, she spent over a year of restless exile in Coppet. It was during this interlude that she completed De l'influence des passions, a work already begun during her stay in England. The subject of the essay, indicated in its full title, De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations, clearly establishes Mme. de Staël's link with the Enlightenment. Although she abandoned her original intention of treating the question of political felicity, an outline of the projected discussion is contained in the work's Introduction. In accordance with the teaching of the Ideologues, a group of savants who dominated intellectual life under the Directory, Mme. de Staël proposed to demonstrate the applicability of the scientific method to problems of political order. Her specific contribution

would focus on the scientific accomodation of the passions within the structure of the state. The body of the essay, however, addressed the question of individual hapiness, an inquiry falling outside the province of the scientific method. The first section examined the destructive effects of passion ("cette force impulsive qui entraîne l'homme indépendament de sa volonté") on the personal happiness of men. The two concluding sections explored ways of mitigating the passions through the cultivation of the less volitile facets of man's nature: paternal and conjugal tenderness, friendship, religious belief, the love of study and philosophy, and the practice of benevolence. The essay was a work of complex intentions. Within its pages could be found an interpretation of the Terror, a plea for compassion and political reconciliation following Thermidor, an introspective portrait of a "superior" woman bareing her emotional wounds, and a "liberal" vision of human nature emphasizing the value of man's private existence. Not the least of Mme. de Staël's purposes was to demonstrate her loyalty to the government, so as to obtain permission to return to France. Hence the essay is punctuated by desperate pleas for sympathy, solemn avowals of her good character and declarations of support for the Republic. Her efforts did not go unrewarded. The essay was accorded an enthusiastic reception by friendly critics like Suard and Roederer, and its authoress received a tacit political pardon.

After passing several months sequestered in Con-

stant's abbey at Herivaux, Mme. de Staël returned to Paris to give birth to his daughter in June 1797. She quickly resumed her political activities, committing herself wholeheartedly to the defense of the Directorial constitution. This stance precipitated a rupture with her former royalist colleagues, members of the Club Clichy, now posing an imminent threat to the Republic as a result of sweeping electoral success in May. To counter the royalist offensive, supporters of the Directory under the stewardship of Benjamin Constant, founded the Club du Salm, with Mme. de Staël presiding as its official hostess. No longer stigmatized as a monarchist sympathizer, she eagerly ingratiated herself with members of the Directorial elite, cultivating an intimate friendship with Barras and establishing close social ties with the Ideologues. Her ambition to serve as the regime's political muse was further nourished by her success in securing the appointment of Talleyrand, an ex-lover, as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Her salon remained open to deputies of all political shadings; pursuing a strategy of reconciliation through discussion, she continued attempts to salvage consensus for the beleaguered regime. Notwithstanding her efforts as a mediatrix, she was an active participant in the preparations leading to the coup d'état of the 18th fructidor, which forcibly overturned the disloyal royalist majority. If to "save" the Republic sanctioned a resort to violence, she did not condone the mass reprisals that followed in its wake. As Talleyrand observed, "Elle a fait

le 18 fructidor, mais elle n'a pas fait le 19."²⁸ Indeed her vigorous attempts to rescue royalist victims of the "dry guillotine," the term popularly used to characterize the mass deportations decreed by the Directory, aroused suspicions in republican circles, while her involvement in the plotting of the coup further disgraced her in the eyes of the monarchists.

As she was now out of favor with the ruling elite, as well as deplored by all factions of the opposition, Mme. de Staël's political influence waned considerably during the term of the "second" Directory. Much of her time was, in fact, preoccupied by private matters such as the threatened invasion of her family property in Coppet by French troops. Shuttling between Coppet and various points in France, the subject of an intermittently enforced decree of exile, she produced no major political work until 1799 when, with the collaboration of Constant, she completed Les circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution. The treatise, which proposed revisions in the Constitution of the Year III and a general reconciliation of all political factions, was eclipsed by the events of the 18th brumaire and remained unpublished until 1932. It is a lengthy, often repetitious, work, which developed and enlarged upon already familiar themes. It proposed a theory of government intended to discredit both the Jacobin ideal of patriotic virtue and the royalist doctrine of divine right. The state, according to Mme. de Stael, was the source of juridical penalties, neces-

essary to the maintenance of social order, but incapable of effecting the moral improvement of its citizens.

Within this context Mme. de Staël set out the celebrated theory of ancient and modern liberty: the former, an anachronistic ideal attributed to the Jacobins, identified liberty with political participation; the latter defined liberty as the absence of political interference. The role of the modern state was, in essence, to protect the undisturbed private life of its citizens. Whereas the character of the ancients was moulded by their participation in civic life, the task of educating modern man fell to an intellectual elite of philosophes and writers. Such arguments served the interests of the Ideologues, whose ideal of a Republic of Letters was enshrined in the National Institute founded in 1795. Mme. de Staël's essay paid tribute to their faith in reason, the scientific method, and the perfectibility of man. Yet she was not an uncritical disciple. Proclaiming her sympathy with the movement to establish an official republican religion, Mme. de Staël favored Protestantism over the deistic cult of theophilanthropy espoused by the majority of her colleagues. Her recommendations for constitutional revision rehearsed familiar themes; she advocated a system of checks and balances incorporating a strengthened executive and upper chamber. Nor did Mme. de Staël neglect the question of political leadership. She acknowledged Jacobin charges of corruption in the ranks of the Directory and called for statesmen of sensibilité to provide the nation

with moral direction. This tension between Mme. de Staël's minimalist conception of government and her positive emphasis on the potentialities of citizenship was to be a recurrent feature of her thought.

Mme. de Staël returned to Paris on the evening of the 18th brumaire. Like the members of the Institute, she was seduced by the vision of Napoleon as the savior of the Republic -- the embodiment of the virtuous political leader who would regenerate and restore a corrupt body politic. She had, in fact, cherished hopes of reigning as Napoleon's mistress and political confidant; hopes which were soon extinguished by his repeated rejections of her advances and his publicly proclaimed distaste for intellectual women. Yet her disenchantment with the hero of brumaire should not be seen as the consequence of his personal rebuffs, but rather as the result of Napoleon's increasingly brazen disdain of republican institutions. It was not long before Mme. de Staël's disillusionment turned to open hostility. The occasion was a scathing attack by Benjamin Constant, then a member of the newly created Tribunate, against Napoleon's attempt to emasculate that body by proclaiming the right of the executive to dictate its procedures of debate. Constant's speech of the 15th nivôse, which denounced the measure as a harbinger of "servitude and silence,"²⁹ provoked the ire of Bonaparte and emptied the salon of Mme. de Staël, whom the First Counsel held personally responsible for Constant's invective.

In April, Mme. de Staël published De la littérature. Ostensibly presented as a gesture of conciliation with the regime, the work was actually a veiled polemic against Napoleon. It contained numerous references to the noxious effects of militarism and arbitrary rule, and it proclaimed Mme. de Staël's continued allegiance to the ideals of the Ideologues, a group which Napoleon had resolved to discredit. The treatise was far more than a political manifesto, however. The greater portion of the work was completed before Napoleon's rise to power and its intent was as much didactic as partisan. Part I of the treatise expounded a theory of literature which synthesized Montesquieuan sociology with the doctrine of perfectibility championed by the Ideologues. It traced the development of the various literary genres through the principal epochs of history and explored the influence of national character on literary endeavor. Part II considered the role of literature in post-revolutionary society.

Although greeted with critical acclaim, the treatise was petulantly dismissed by Napoleon:

Je me suis mis à l'étude au moins un quart d'heure pour tâcher d'y comprendre quelque chose ... mais toute l'attention de mon intelligence n'a pas réussi à trouver un sens à une seule de ses idées réputées si profondes.³⁰

Indeed throughout the years 1800-1803, the two protagonists followed a course of mutual provocation. For Bonaparte, Mme. de Staël's salon activities remained a festering sore. Among the salon's regular visitors were members

of his intimate circle, including his brothers Joseph and Lucien; moreover, he was receiving exaggerated reports of conspiratorial meetings from Mme. de Genlis, Mme. de Staël's literary rival. The purge of the Tribunal in 1802 provoked an open clash. Angered by the removal of Constant and his colleagues, many of whom were members of the Institute, Mme. de Staël publicly dubbed Napoleon an "ideophobe." In the spring, she participated in the abortive General's Plot led by Bernadotte. Although he kept fully informed of Mme. de Staël's intrigues, Napoleon took no formal measures to silence her until the publication of Delphine. A rambling novel in epistolary style, Delphine was set during the period of the French Revolution. Its plot centered on the ill-fated love affair of Delphine d'Abbémar, a young widow whose exceptional sensibilité placed her outside the norms of conventional morality, and Léonce de Mondoville, an aristocrat whose susceptibility to social pressure led him to sacrifice happiness with Delphine for the sake of his reputation. The novel's plea for the right of women to personal fulfillment was distasteful to Napoleon. Its tributes to the English constitution and attack on Catholicism in the wake of the Concordat seemed calculated provocations. Mme. de Staël was officially exiled from Paris in December, 1802. She set out for Germany the following October after having spent nearly a year engaged in futile attempts to obtain a pardon.

By a triumphal tour of Germany, where Delphine had reaped immense critical and popular success, Mme. de Staël

hoped to strengthen her position domestically. Napoleon, she reasoned, dared not refuse the petitions of a woman "who was acclaimed abroad as the glory of the French civilization."³¹ Her friendships with Germanophiles like Charles Villers, Camille Jordan, J.M. de Gerando and Lezay-Marnésia, as well as her research for De la littérature, had given her a surface familiarity with the main currents of German thought. Despite her desire to enrich this knowledge, Mme. de Staël undertook the journey with great reluctance. For the remainder of her career, she would display a deep-seated ethnocentric distaste for travel³² that was not easily reconciled with her natural inquisitiveness and intellectual cosmopolitanism:

Il faut enfin partir et j'entraî dans cette Allemagne dont je connoissois à peine alors le mérite littéraire, avec un effroi tout à fait parisien. Je ne voyois dans le reste du monde que l'éloignement de la France, et je ne me faisois l'idée de rien que cette manière négative.³³

Notwithstanding these initial reservations and an inauspicious stopover in Frankfurt, Mme. de Staël's German sejour proved immensely valuable to her career. In Weimar, she made the acquaintance of Goethe, Schiller and Wieland, and was intensively tutored in German philosophy by the young Englishman, Henry Crabb Robinson; in Berlin, she met Fichte and A.W. Schlegel, the expositor of German romanticism, whom she took back with her to Coppet as part of her household. Although Mme. de Staël's views had not been fundamentally altered by this first-hand exposure to German culture, the elements of Rousseauian emotionalism already pre-

sent in her thought were further drawn out. The idea that the national-rootedness and natural spontaneity of the German culture could prove a salutary counterweight to the excessive social and intellectual worldliness of the French had occurred to Mme. de Staël during her stay in Weimar. De l'Allemagne, the fruit of this inspiration, however, would not be completed for another six years.

The news of Necker's death brought Mme. de Staël's trip to an abrupt and emotionally shattering conclusion. Upon returning to Coppet, she immersed herself in the task of preparing for publication a collection of her father's manuscripts. Seven months later (December, 1804), she departed for Italy, accompanied by Schlegel and J.C.L. de Sismondi, the author of the Histoire des républiques italiennes au moyen âge. Her intention was to collect materials for her second novel. The six month visit which took Mme. de Staël from Milan to Naples was crammed with exhaustive sight-seeing excursions, assiduous note-gathering, aristocratic soirees and public receptions. The journey gave birth to Corinne, a work aptly assessed as the "worst great novel ever written."³⁴ Like Delphine, it explored a foredoomed relationship between an exceptional woman and a man bound to the dictates of social convention. Unlike her earlier heroine, however, Corinne was portrayed as a woman of genius (a poetess), as well as possessing unique emotional sensibility. Most significantly, Corinne stands as a work of comparative sociology. Plot lines fade into des-

criptions of the political, social and cultural determinants of the Italian nation. The novel's protagonists are less individual personalities than caricatures of their national traits: Ostwald embodies the liberal aristocracy of England; d'Erfeuil symbolizes the frivolous French nobility; Gorinne represents a hybrid of Italian passion and English reason. The official press stigmatized the work as anti-French.

The years 1805-1810 have been dubbed "les grands jours de Coppet." There in splendid isolation from Napoleonic hegemony a great proportion of the intellectual elite of Europe gathered to shape the nascent romantic movement, producing such seminal works of literary criticism as Wilhelm Schlegel's Cours sur la poésie dramatique, Sismondi's De la littérature du midi de l'Europe, Prosper de Barante's Tableau de la littérature française aux XVIII^e siècle, Bonstetten's L'Homme de Nord et l'homme du midi, Constant's preface to Wallenstein, and Mme. de Staël's own De l'Allemagne. According to the Coppet circle, the roots of modern literature were German and Christian. This theory "seemed an aggressive act of encirclement of French classicism"²⁵ and carried profound political implications that did not escape Napoleon. A common opposition to Napoleon unified the otherwise disparate political philosophies of the group; this spirit of resistance generated works of polemical history like Sismondi's recently uncovered Recherches sur les constitutions des peuples libres. In later years, the religious mysticism of Mme. Krudener and Zacharias Werner penetrated

the Coppet circle. Seeking solace from emotional wounds, Mme de Staël showed sympathy for their teachings but stopped short of embracing a philosophy of irrationalism and social withdrawal.³⁶

Mme de Staël's residence at Coppet during this period was punctuated by a series of extended excursions outside the Lake Geneva retreat. From April 1806 to April 1807 she attempted to return to Paris. Her strategy was to approach the capital through a "circular system of approximations,"³⁷ progressively installing herself at Auxerre, Rouen and Meulan. Upon her arrival in Paris she was expelled at the directive of Napoleon. In 1808 Mme de Staël undertook a second trip to Germany for the purpose of completing research for De l'Allemagne. She spent five months in Vienna where she frequented aristocratic social gatherings and attended Schlegel's celebrated lectures on literary drama. By meeting with Friedrich Gentz in Teplitz, she provoked Napoleon to place her under permanent police surveillance.

In the spring of 1810 Mme de Staël returned to France to complete arrangements for the publication of De l'Allemagne, the incendiary product of seven years labor. Like her earlier efforts, it is a work of comparative analysis with a conceptual framework derived from Montesquieu's theory of physical and moral causes. The treatise is divided into four sections describing German geography, laws and customs; literature and art; philosophy; and religion.

De l'Allemagne may be described as a monumental textbook of instruction, an attempt to acquaint French readers with all aspects of an unfamiliar and inaccessible culture, as well as an intellectual and political manifesto. In this latter capacity, Mme de Staël envisioned that her portrait of Germany would have the practical consequence of penetrating the intellectual quarantine imposed by Napoleonic censorship and spurring the spiritual and cultural renewal of France through an infusion of fresh ideas. Thus she established "enthusiasm" as the characteristic animating passion of the German nation; precisely the quality which, to her mind, lied dormant in France, muzzled by the political despotism of Napoleon and the intellectual tyranny of utilitarian philosophy and literary neo-classicism. While Mme de Staël portrayed France and Germany as nearly dichotomous national types, she ascribed to neither nation a monopoly of valued traits. Instead she oscillated between rejoicing in the cultural individuality of each (as against Napoleon's dream of establishing French cultural hegemony) and advocating a mutual exchange of ideas that would effect a reconciliation on middle ground, creating a cosmopolitan European spirit ³⁸ (an objective equally incompatible with Napoleonic intentions). Aware of the work's seditious implications, Napoleon ordered the manuscript and proofs of De l'Allemagne destroyed and its authoress expelled from France.

Returning to Coppet in October, Mme de Staël found the conditions of her exile intolerable. At Napoleon's directive, she was placed under virtual quarantine: her ac-

tivities were carefully monitored by a network of spies; her travels severely restricted; her friends forbidden visits on penalty of exile. She formulated plans of escape to England. Her departure was delayed by the birth of her son, fathered by a twenty-four year old ex-hussar named John Rocca, who would become her second husband.

In May 1812, Mme de Staël fled Coppel accompanied by Schlegel and her daughter, Albertine. While England remained her ultimate destination, legal restrictions necessitated a circuitous journey through Austria, Russia and Sweden. Her arrival at St. Petersburg in early August inaugurated a period of intense political activity. She had come to regard the War of 1812 as a Manichaean battle between the forces of good and evil,³⁹ viewing Napoleon's defeat as a moral as well as a political imperative. With Russia: the apparent instrument of European salvation, Mme de Staël offered her services to Czar Alexander on the eve of his fateful conference at Åbo with Bernadotte, now the Crown Prince of Sweden. She counseled Alexander on how to deal with her former ally, who, because of a smoldering dispute over Finland, was reluctant to enter an anti-Napoleonic coalition under the leadership of Russia. In Stockholm, the following month, Mme de Staël intensified her campaign to promote Swedish participation. She paid daily visits to Bernadotte; engineered the appointment of Schlegel as Bernadotte's private secretary, and collaborated with him on the propagandistic brochure Sur le système continental et sur les rapports avec la Suède; gave diplomatic negotiations of major importance; and persuaded Moreau to

assume command of the Coalition forces. She can be credited with having hastened Swedish accession to the Fourth Coalition, a factor which proved decisive in Napoleon's defeat.⁴⁰ A second objective to which Mme de Staël applied herself with equal zeal, though less success, was the installation of Bernadotte on the French throne. In her correspondence with governmental leaders, as well as in the preface to her celebrated essay Réflexions sur le suicide, Mme de Staël caricatured Bernadotte as the model of liberal enlightened constitutional monarch -- an appropriate heir to the French revolutionary tradition, as she so interpreted it.

No less significant was the question of a suitable constitutional structure for the post-Napartist regime. Mme de Staël's predilections for English institutions, judiciously muted during the Thermidorian-Directorial interlude, was now rekindled by the example of resolute British opposition to Napoleon and intellectually nourished by extensive research carried out during her stay in London.⁴¹ Shortly after her arrival in May 1813, Mme de Staël began the composition of her seminal history of the Revolution, Considérations sur la révolution française, which repeatedly advanced the theme of the applicability of the English model. The failure to adopt it in 1791, she maintained, led to the aberrations of the Terror and Napoleon. Under the Restoration, it would lead to an analogous collapse of liberty. The fourth book of the treatise she devoted entirely to an idealized portrait of the English nation. That Mme de

Staël intended the work to serve as a vindication of Necker's policies goes far in explaining its English bias; yet in it Necker's views are expanded and enlarged by the depth of her research and the scope of her intentions.

On the level of practical politics, however, the defeat of Napoleon remained Mme de Staël's immediate objective. Over this issue, she was forced into a reluctant alliance with the governing Tories and compelled to part political company with her ideological brethren, the Whigs. Disconcerted but not discouraged, Mme de Staël held numerous meetings with Whig leaders, seeking to persuade them that support of Napoleon was incompatible with the traditional liberal principles of the party. Her campaign against Bonaparte received an additional impetus with the publication of the English edition of De l'Allemagne, which she negotiated upon her arrival in London.

Her London campaign to promote the candidacy of Bernadotte failed dismally, though, as attested to by Fanny Allen, it was not for any lack of effort on Mme de Staël's part, "Elle parlait si souvent de lui qu'on crut un certain temps qu'elle était un agent secret payé par le gouvernement suédois."⁴² While the Whigs persisted in their support of Napoleon, the Tories contemplated a Bourbon restoration. The latter option became increasingly attractive, or at least less repugnant to Mme de Staël during the winter of 1813-14 when she began to confront the abhorrent realities of a Russian occupation of France. Thus she chastened Constant for his

De l'Esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation, a brilliant polemical against Napoleon written on behalf of Bernadotte:

Le duc de Berry est venu me voir et je ne suis pas mal avec les Bourbons -- S'ils reviennent, il faudra se soumettre, car soumettre, car tout vaud mieux que de nouveau troubles. ... Réfléchissez mûrement à ce que vous êtes en train de faire. On peut tout dire dans un grand ouvrage; mais dans un pamphlet, qui est une action, il faut bien choisir le moment -- On ne doit pas dire du mal des Français lorsque les Russes sont à Langres -- Que Dieu me bannisse de France, plutôt, que de m'y faire rentrer à l'aide des étrangers! ⁴³

Nonetheless, in the same letter, she continued to profess her own allegiance to Bernadotte ("Je l'ai vu de près et je le tiens pour le meilleur et le plus noble des hommes qui puissent régner."), and it was not until his ultimate demise in the spring of 1814 that Mme. de Staël openly rallied to the Bourbons.

Following Napoleon's abdication, Mme. de Staël returned to France to resume her salon activities and her accustomed role as political gadfly. Her acceptance of the constitutional architecture provided for in the Charte did not extend to the mode of its issuance -- it was "granted" by Louis XVIII as an act of royal grace, not as a contract by one branch of a balanced system of government ⁴⁴ -- which, to her mind, symbolized a sweeping repudiation of the Revolution. The theme Mme. de Staël had consistently articulated throughout her career -- that the Revolution must be defended for its gains (if reviled for its excesses) -- emerged again in the Considerations, now enriched by a mature intelligence, improved scholarship, and a deepened sense of historical awareness. This treatise proved her most en-

during legacy to the new generation of Liberals -- Barante, DeBroglie, Guizot, Jordan -- who had now begun serving their political apprenticeship in her salon. During the interlude of the Hundred Days, Mme de Staël was faced with a profound dilemma: ever skeptical of her celebrated adversary, but fearing renewed invasion, distrustful of the Bourbons, and hopeful of personal financial advantages, she reluctantly lent her support to the Acte additionnel framed, at the behest of Napoleon, by his newly converted ally Benjamin Constant.

Since her return to Paris in the spring, Mme de Staël's health had deteriorated rapidly. It was in Italy, where she was forced to spend the winter, that the marriage of her daughter, Albertine, to Duc Victor de Broglie, the "Doctrinaire" and future Minister to Louis Phillipe, took place in February, 1815. For the less than two years that remained of her life, Mme de Staël divided her time between Paris and Coppet, relentlessly residing over her salon, socializing with an endless stream of political and literary notables, and carrying on with her writings. Her last work, which remained uncompleted, was Dix années d'exil, an intimate chronicle of her persecution by Napoleon and her journey through Sweden and Russia. Mme de Staël died on July 14, 1817, the twenty-eighth anniversary of the taking of the Bastille. Her collected works were published three years later by her son, Auguste.

NOTES

¹Georges Sorel, The Illusions of Progress (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 125-30.

²George Kelly, "Liberalism and the Aristocracy in the French Restoration," Journal of the History of Ideas No. 26 (1965), p. 514.

³Quoted in B. d'Andlau, La jeunesse de Madame de Staël (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), p. 51.

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

⁵Ibid., p. 26.

⁶Quoted in J. Christopher Herold, Mistress to an Age (Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958), pp. 30-1.

⁷Quoted in André Lang, Une vie d'orages: Germaine de Staël (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1958), p. 7.

⁸Pierre Kohler, Mme. de Staël et la Suisse (Lausanne: Librairie Payot, 1916), ch. IV.

⁹George Poulet, "La pensée critique de Mme. de Staël," Preuves, No. 16 (Dec. 1966), p. 28.

¹⁰For a discussion of the attack against Necker see Frances Ascomb, Anglophobia in France 1763-1789 (N. Carolina: Duke University Press, 1950), pp. 89-92.

¹¹Lettre 16 août 1789 in Mme. de Staël, Correspondance general, ed. by Beatrice Jasinski (3t. in 5 vols.; Paris: J.J. Pauvert, 1962-68), I deuxième parties, p.328.

¹²M.J.C. Vile, Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 184.

¹³R.R. Palmer, The Age of Democratic Revolution, Vol. I: The Challenge (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 493.

¹⁴Correspondance, Jasinski, pp. 330, 332, and 334.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 371.

¹⁶The term is used by Vincent Starzinger, Middlingness: Juste Milieu Political Theory in France and England (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965).

¹⁷Correspondance, Jasinski, p. 371.

¹⁸See A. Goodwin, "Reform and Revolution in France: October 1789 - February 1793," in The New Cambridge Modern History (England: Cambridge University Press, 1965), Vol. VIII, ch. XXIV, pp. 680-713.

¹⁹Lettre 16 septembre 1791, Correspondance, Jasinski, p. 493.

²⁰Steven Golin, "Mme. de Staël and the Rejection of Happiness: A Study in the End of the Enlightenment" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1968), p.95.

²¹Constant was schooled at the University of Edinburgh, whose faculty members then included Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart and Adam Ferguson.

²²For a full background see B. Munteano, Les idées politique de Mme. de Staël et la Constitution de l'an III (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1931).

²³Ibid., p. 12.

²⁴Correspondance, Jasinski, III, p. 321.

²⁵Quoted in Isser Woloch, Jacobin Legacy (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 65.

²⁶Louis de Villefosse, The Scourge of the Eagle (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972), p. 52.

²⁷Quoted in Muntaeno, Idées politiques, p. 29.

²⁸Quoted in G.E. Gwynne, Mme. de Staël et la Révolution française (Paris: A-G Nizet, 1969), p. 42.

²⁹Quoted in Herold, Mistress, p. 262.

³⁰Quoted in Paul Gautier, Mme. de Staël et Napoléon (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1902), p. 132.

³¹Herold, Mistress, p. 262.

³²On this point see Simone Balayé, "Absence, Exile, Voyage," Colloque de Coppet: Mme. de Staël et l'Europe (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1970), pp. 227-37.

³³Mme. de Staël, Carnets de Voyage, ed. by Simone Balayé (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1971), p. 25.

³⁴Herold, Mistress, p. 312.

³⁵Albert Thibaudet, French Literature from 1795 to Our Era (N.Y.: Funk & Wagnalls, 1967), p. 56.

³⁶On this point see Susan St. Onge, "Evolution of the Religious Thought of Mme. de Staël" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1971).

³⁷Herold, Mistress, p. 328.

³⁸For this insight I am indebted to René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, Vol. II; The Romantic Age (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 229.

³⁹See Norman King, "Mme. de Staël et la chute de Napoléon," Colloque de Coppet, pp. 63-75.

⁴⁰Herold, Mistress, p. 432.

⁴¹See Beatrice Jasinski, "Mme. de Staël, l'Angleterre de 1813-14 et les Considérations sur la Révolution française," Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France (Janvier 1966), pp. 12-24.

⁴²Mme. de Staël, Carnets, p. 357.

⁴³Lettre de 23 janvier 1814 in Lettres de Mme. de Staël à Benjamin Constant, ed. by la Baronne de Nolde (Paris: Kra, 1928), pp. 57-62.

⁴⁴Vile, Constitutionalism, p. 201.

CHAPTER II:

PROLEGOMENA

In his Histoire des idées politiques, Jean Touchard characterized nineteenth century French liberal thought as "essentiellement confuse."¹ His observation aptly describes the writings of Mme. de Staël, the spiritual mother of the Restoration liberals, and points up the acute difficulty facing the student of her ideas. To undertake a serious study of Mme. de Staël's works is to confront a disheartening number of loose definitions, ambiguous concepts, conflicting angles of vision, and logical inconsistencies. Indeed she emerges as a stubbornly obscure figure, not due to an esoteric literary style or an impenetrable intellectuality, but rather as a consequence of the multiplicity of strands woven together in her thought. Accordingly, the present chapter is designed to suggest guidelines for the interpretation of her works. After a brief consideration of the manner in which her private life impinged upon her political writings, I shall focus on the various roles Mme. de Staël assumed throughout the course of her career: political activist, ideologist, political theorist and pedagogue. I shall examine the inconsistencies in her thought that derive from the overlapping of these roles,

as well as investigate the intellectual tensions peculiar to each.

What may be termed the "idiosyncratic" aspects of Mme. de Staël's thought -- traits principally rooted in biographical or psychological factors -- affected her writings in various ways. First, such considerations frequently informed her choice of literary genre. Perpetually distraught by calumnies leveled against her by a hostile press or disillusioned lovers, Mme. de Staël often adopted highly personalized literary forms as a direct means of responding to her critics (or to those of Necker, her alter-ego) and vindicating her behavior. Thus she turned to the autobiographical novel in Delphine and Corinne, the memoir in Dix années d'exile, and the eloge in Du caractère de M. Necker et de sa vie privée. Second, the overlapping of her emotional and political commitments was responsible for such curious turns in her analysis as the juxtaposition of "love" and "partisan fanaticism" in her political treatise on the passions. Third, certain omissions in her argument or gaps in her narrative can be traced to belated regrets over events in which she was personally implicated. Her account of the Revolution passed quickly over Narbonne's ministry and the fructidor coup, failing to mention her part in either. Lastly, Mme. de Staël's sexual self-awareness accounted for important areas of her theoretical concern such as the

woman's distinctive role in socio-political arrangements and the social predicament of the woman of genius. Moreover her sex afforded Mme. de Stael a unique justification of her role as social critic: "Pour moi, qui n'ai rien à craindre ni à espérer dans la carrière politique, j'ai pensée que cette indépendance me faisait une loi d'exprimer les opinions que je crois utiles."²

POLITICAL ACTIVIST:

From her childhood apprenticeship in Mme. Necker's drawing-room to her own celebrated establishments on the rue de Bac and at Coppet, Mme. de Staël's public life centered about the salon. The part played by this institution in shaping Mme. de Staël's intellectual perspectives was crucial, and needs to be examined within the context of the historical transformation of the salon's role in French society. Except for a concern with questions of sexual equality and educational reform,³ salonières of an earlier era had generally remained aloof from the social and political life of their day. The primary function of the seventeenth century salon was to "amuse;" its habitués devoted themselves to cultivating the arts of literature and conversation. The eighteenth century salon frequented by the philosophes, while preserving an emphasis on literary technique, turned its attentions outward to the realms of politics, religion and economics. With the philosophe casting himself the role of social reformer, a sense of

mission and commitment permeated the atmosphere of the salons which now served as nuclei of an emergent république des lettres. A variety of factors contributed to this transformation: the growth in size of the reading public; the emancipation of the man of letters from the constraints of financial patronage (although as Voltaire observed in the Lettres philosophiques⁴, English authors enjoyed far greater financial independence than did their French counterparts); and a changing political climate. Nonetheless Tocqueville's point was well taken: the philosophe still remained apart from the actual business of governing and thus unhampered by the exigencies of practical politics. Against this background, Mme. de Staël's quality of mind may be more fully appreciated.

From her seventeenth century ancestors Mme. de Staël inherited a fascination with literature, as exemplified by her De la littérature, as well as a keen sensitivity to the conversational arts. Her eighteenth century predecessors bequeathed a sense of social responsibility along with a broadened range of intellectual concerns. Mme. de Staël's conception of literature expanded accordingly; her interest in its formal aesthetic qualities took second place to an examination of its role in socio-political arrangements. Yet by virtue of her active involvement in the political events of her day, Mme. de Staël distinguished herself from both sets of predecessors. Within the course of the Revolution, the salon was transformed from an insulated intellec-

tual gathering place into a political club wherein strategies of maneuver were mapped out and alliances cemented. Mme. de Staël's spiritual colleagues (if political adversaries) were Mme. de Condorcet and Mme. Rolland rather than Mme. de Tencin or even Mme. Necker. Her objectives were immediately practical, whether to marshal support for Necker's policies, to influence the framing of constitutions, or to topple Napoleon. Her conversational eloquence was enlisted not to "amuse" but to "convince." Hence Lacretelle's observation, "son salon fut ouvert aux hommes les plus habitués à se combattre violemment à la tribune; elle espérait les calmer en les subjuguant par son éloquence."⁶

Mme. de Staël's engagement in politics was not limited to the confines of her salon; through the medium of her writings, she aspired to reach a wider audience -- to influence public opinion. In 1791, Necker had referred to "l'opinion publique" as the cornerstone of his writings ("More than anyone else, I have called attention in my various works to the rule of public opinion and its increasing power"⁷). Following his lead, Mme. de Staël placed much emphasis on this newly emergent force in political affairs. Hence she viewed her literary efforts as the logical extension of her salon activities and openly assumed the role of propagandist. This orientation accounted for certain characteristics of her prose style and method of argument which I shall presently consider.

Style:

First, it is noteworthy that although Mme. de Staël's prose ranged from colorless technical discourse to passages of inspired eloquence, her writing was almost entirely devoid of the wit she characteristically displayed in her salon. That she eschewed this means of persuasion can be seen as an attempt to impress her readers with the seriousness of her intentions (her critics often seized upon her sex to satirically dismiss her writings) and to distinguish her style from the aristocratic frivolity characteristic of the Old Regime.

Second, Mme. de Staël's efforts to win endorsement for her views frequently led her to adopt a highly polemical and exhortatory style of expression which tended to conceal the essentially moderate nature of her actual recommendations and contributed to inconsistencies in her argument.

Finally, a few words must be said about Mme. de Staël's use of language. As a publicist, Mme. de Staël was acutely sensitive to the emotional values of language, and especially to the powerful appeal of revolutionary rhetoric:

Un homme d'esprit l'a dit: les mots ramènent les choses. Lorsqu'il faut toujours prononcer de certaines paroles, pour opérer les effets même les plus opposés au sens de ces paroles, elle commandent à la fin.

Proceeding from this insight, she appropriated the vocabulary of the Revolution, but, in the process, defused and subverted its radical content. This strategy is exempli-

fied by her use of the concepts "volonté générale" and "égalité politique." In Mme. de Staël's early pamphlet, A quels signes peut-on connoître quelle est l'opinion de la majorité de la nation?, the concept "volonte generale" is stripped of its association with the Rousseauian-Jacobin ideal of an all-embracing communal citizenship and equated instead with "l'opinion publique" characteristic of a moderate constitutional monarchy. In like manner, she deployed the term "égalité politique" in Des circonstances actuelles (however, as seen by her repudiation of the term in her earlier Réflexions sur le paix intérieure, she was slower in recognizing its polemical value⁹); arguing that "la liberté politique est une et même chose que l'égalité politique,"¹⁰ she went on to reconcile the value with a discriminatory two-stage process of election.

Methods of argument;

Mme. de Staël's practical political purposes contributed in various ways to shape the contours of her arguments. The present section will examine her handling of theory as related to her role as a political activist in an age of revolutionary upheaval and bifurcated partisan extremism. Mme. de Staël's historical circumstances and political role permit few parallels to be drawn with her eighteenth century forebearers. The philosophes experienced conditions of social and political ferment, not open conflict and telescoped constitutional change; they were,

in general, political observers and critics, not participants in the affairs of state; they leveled their attacks against a single, if multi-layered, target -- the abuses of the Old Regime -- not the competing claims of widely disparate philosophies. Operating under a different set of circumstances, Mme de Staël was required to develop certain modes of political argument and polemical techniques largely unanticipated by her predecessors. The philosophes had little need to acquire a sensitivity to an ever shifting constellation of political forces; to address practical issues of political compromise and consensus-building, or to confront the problem of consolidating and arresting political change. These considerations profoundly affected the quality of her theorizing and often directly contributed to the tensions and inconsistencies of her arguments.

We can roughly categorize Mme de Staël's political strategies as oriented towards either positive or negative ends: the salvaging of consensus or the discrediting of her political opponents.

Mme de Staël's positive strategy of consensus-building is immediately revealed by her commitment to a centrist political position, and her specific appeals to the 'moderate' blocs of monarchist and republican opinion. Her arguments aimed at discovering values common to all moderate factions, while simultaneously minimizing the differences that separated them. This effort led her to invoke conceptually vague but broadly accommodating ideals like ordre and propriété: Hence the conciliatory character of her constitu-

tional proposals. Mme de Staël repeatedly stressed the practical imperatives of compromise. The alternatives were either reconciliation on her political terms or irremedial violence. On a more abstract plane, she alluded to man's natural instinct of "benevolence" which inspired gestures of mutual accommodation; alternatively, she appealed to the material "interests" of her readers, arguing that their economic well-being was jeopardized by the perpetuation of revolutionary violence.

Against these groups lying outside the spectrum of accommodation, Mme de Staël deployed a variety of tactics. A favorite polemical maneuver was to stigmatize her opponents on the Right "absolutists" and on the Left "anarchists" (conversely, she identified political moderates with the approbatory labels, "royalistes, amis de la liberté / républicains, amis de l'ordre").¹¹ This crude dichotomy not only enabled Mme. de Staël to ignore the actual complexity of her opponents' positions (the radical egalitarianism of the Babeuvists set them apart from the more moderate Jacobins), but also led her to exaggerate their political intransigence (the Jacobins had, in fact, displayed a willingness to abide by the framework of the Thermidorian Constitution).¹² Mme. de Staël's critique of her extremist opponents incorporated discrepant appeals to history and human nature. Her concept of historical progress furnished a double-edged weapon with which to repudiate the Jacobins' idealization of classical antiquity, as well as the Reactionaries' veneration of tradition. This theory of historical progress she coupled with

an incompatible appeal to historical precedent designed to challenge the accuracy of the Reactionary version of French history. Finally, Mme de Staël enlisted two separate polemical strategies founded on appeals to human nature: the first proclaimed the primacy of man's self-interest against the Jacobin ideal of civisme; the second, grounded in a theory of the passions, deplored the partisan "fanaticism" of both political extremes. These strategies will be studied at greater length in what follows.

IDEOLOGIST:

In the present context, I shall interpret as "ideological" those aspects of Mme. de Staël's thought which may be seen to relate to her social position and economic class. The dangers of this approach have been emphasized by historians of the Revolution like Alfred Cobban,¹³ who quite correctly point out that members of the same socio-economic group frequently adopted contrasting political views. Indeed Mme. de Staël herself implicitly affirmed the validity of Cobban's criticism by her politically derived distinction between the liberal and reactionary aristocracy (see below). Nevertheless Mme. de Staël's double allegiance to the bourgeoisie, through the banking heritage of Necker, and to the aristocracy, by birth, marriage, and romantic involvements, may be seen to contribute important insights to the understanding of her work. For example, in order to understand why in 1789 Mme. de Staël advocated the creation of an aristocratic upper legislative chamber over the strong

objections of the tiers, it is surely necessary (though not sufficient) to refer to her closely felt ties to the nobility. From a broader perspective, "class" figured prominently as a category of her theorizing. Her efforts to legitimize the claims of the bourgeoisie informed her interpretation of the Revolution, her reading of French history, and her vision of a free society. Mme. de Staël's commitment to the defense of aristocratic interests was more discriminating, but had equally profound consequences for all areas of her thought. These observations will be developed at length in the succeeding chapters. For the present, what must be done here is to explicate Mme. de Stael's concept of social class.

For polemical as well as analytical reasons, Mme. de Staël used the common terminology of her day when treating the subject of class relations. The classes she referred to were thus: l'aristocratie (la noblesse), les propriétaires (le tiers état) and le peuple. Upon close inspection, however, we find no consistent set of criteria on the basis of which Mme. de Stael distinguished these three social groups. If she attributed an all-embracing class consciousness to the middle class and the peuple, she did not do so in the case of the aristocracy. Nor were distinctions uniformly drawn on the basis of the ownership of wealth. Mme. de Staël's polemical objectives contributed to these confusions, and it is appropriate to note that her treatment of all three classes contained value judgments of

an explicitly ideological nature.

Although Mme. de Staël never investigated the composition of the tiers in a sustained manner, it may be gathered from her writings that she assumed it to include the following groups: manufacturers, merchants, financiers, landed proprietors and intellectuals. Not only did her broad references to the tiers gloss over the polymorphous character of this social compound, but it equally failed to take into account the proportional distribution of its component groups. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the tiers consisted of lawyers and petty functionaries rather than manufacturers, financiers or savants, was not easily reconciled with Mme. de Staël's extravagant ideological claims on its behalf (such as her contention that the tiers was the modern agent of historical progress). She advanced two objective criteria in terms of which the tiers constituted an identifiable social class: its members a) were property owners and b) performed socially useful functions. We may note the circular logic (the general good being equated with the contribution of the middle class) and openly polemical quality of the latter criterion (by definition, those not members of the tiers were sources of social waste). Lastly, she attributed a common class consciousness to the tiers founded on interests at once subjective to their class and objectively valid for the nation. These interests may be summarized as a commitment to domestic order, constitutional government and material

prosperity. The expression of these interests, Mme. de Staël tendentially referred to as "l'opinion publique."

Mme. de Staël's treatment of le peuple was both brief and openly hostile. She posited "propertylessness" as the defining characteristic of the class, but left this concept inexplicit. She was equally vague as to whether the peuple possessed a consciousness of class membership and its interests, or was driven by irrational passions and appetites. In either case, Mme. de Staël concluded that the peuple constituted a revolutionary threat as the implacable enemies of social order.

As employed by Mme. de Staël, the term aristocratie embraced the following distinctions: the nobility of ancient lineage -- the parvenu nobility; reactionary apologists of the Old Regime -- liberal proponents of the Revolution; the emigres of 1791 -- the émigrés of 1792.¹⁴ On the basis of these distinctions, Mme. de Staël defined her role as spokeswoman for the aristocracy: she undertook to defend the claims of the liberal aristocrats of ancient lineage, and to repudiate the claims of the reactionary parvenus. What is striking about Mme. de Staël's position is that it conflated social and political categories of analysis (associating liberalism with ancient birth and reactionary extremism with titles newly purchased). This confusion will be carried over into her treatment of the aristocratie as a social class.

"Privilege" was the essential feature that marked

off the aristocracy as a social class. This criterion alone, however, did not allow Mme. de Staël to make the discriminations necessary to her argument. To differentiate between the ancient and parvenu nobility, she posited the further criterion of "tradition," "The nobility loses its whole empire over the imagination if it cannot be traced back to the nuit de temps."¹⁵ A second characteristic she often imputed to the ancient aristocracy was functional utility: like the tiers, the aristocratie provided services useful to the population. These elements combined to create a class consciousness distinctive to the ancient aristocracy; an outlook Mme. de Staël identified with enlightened rational conservatism (more concretely stated, this entailed the acceptance of liberal constitutionalism combined with a reverence for traditional values). By contrast, the parvenu nobility could claim none of the advantages of tradition, and enjoyed privileged status despite the fact that they no longer performed socially useful functions (upon purchasing titles, members of the tiers relinquished their trades). Their interests, conceived exclusively in terms of the retention of privilege, dictated a reactionary allegiance to the institutions of the Old Regime. During her republican period, Mme. de Staël inclined to ascribe this position to the aristocracy as a whole, and on this basis denied the legitimacy of hereditary institutions.

Lastly, in the Considérations, Mme. de Staël's com-

comparisons of the French and English aristocracy emphasized still another criterion of distinction: the openness of the aristocracy to recruitment from other classes. From this view, she contrasted the caste-like exclusivity of the French noblesse with the liberal recruitment practices of the English aristocracy. She specifically praised the English policy of cooption based on "merit."

POLITICAL THEORIST:

In this section, political theory will be interpreted as an inquiry into the nature of the common good.¹⁶ While such an inquiry may indeed incorporate certain elements I have referred to as "ideological" or "political," the scope of its concerns reaches beyond the justification of particular socio-economic interests or partisan appeals. Based on this understanding, Mme. de Staël's role as a political theorist must be clarified and related to those intellectual traditions which informed her perspectives.

Of the many thinkers who contributed to Mme. de Staël's theoretical concerns, it was Montesquieu to whom she owes her greatest debt. Thus while interpreters of her thought rightly stress the influence of Necker, it must also be borne in mind that she regarded her father as Montesquieu's most brilliant disciple. Against the background of Montesquieu, she evolved her methodology of political inquiry; adopting her predecessor's sociological vision, she included within her investigation of the common good not only

its political components, but also its social, economic and cultural determinants.

Following Montesquieu's lead, Mme. de Staël adopted liberty as the cornerstone of her political thought and set out to define the character of a society that was both modern and free. Yet her distinct historical vantage point precluded Mme. de Staël's literal application of Montesquieu: since his model of the monarchy had been made obsolete by the Revolution, Mme. de Staël undertook to define those gains of the Revolution that ought to be incorporated into a revised liberal political sociology. In keeping with Montesquieu's own political moderation, she maintained centrist posture, equidistant from reactionary demands for a return to the Old Regime and the radical call for an egalitarian and omniscient political order. She acknowledged the legitimacy of the aristocrats' claims, but only within the context of a constitutionalist balance of powers and social forces. She acknowledged the legitimacy of the radical plea for equality, but restricted its meaning to equality of opportunity and limited the role of the state to the protection of privacy and the maintenance of order. These themes remained permanent features of her thought, although the details of her solutions varied according to the monarchical and republican phases of her career.

Together with her image of the state as a guarantor of individual privacy, Mme. de Staël advanced a conception

of politics as an activity intrinsic to man's moral excellence. This strand of her thought was nourished by a theoretical tradition known as civic humanism, which developed from Aristotle and esteemed civic life as essential to man's self-perfection. Mme. de Staël's two conflicting images of the political were underpinned by corresponding versions of human nature: the first held that man was a private being, monopolized by economic pursuits and domestic involvements; the second envisaged man as a citizen, whose personality was affirmed by his participation in the political life of the community. While these tensions were never satisfactorily resolved by Mme. de Staël, we shall see that her attempts to reconcile them pointed the way from Montesquieu to Tocqueville.

PEDAGOGUE:

Throughout her writings Mme. de Staël consistently affirmed the value of scholarship. While she sometimes counseled that knowledge be pursued as an end in itself or as a retreat from the vicissitudes of temporal existence,¹⁷ she generally regarded it as a guide to practical action. Accordingly, knowledge was seen to heighten social consciousness ("L'habitude des occupations intellectuelles inspire une bienveillance éclairée pour les hommes et les choses.")¹⁸ and inevitably lead to practical recommendations for social reform.

As a pedagogue, Mme. de Staël most frequently

turned to comparative analysis as a tool of instruction. Nearly all of her major works were informed by a comparative perspective: De la littérature, De l'Allemagne, Corinne, Considérations, Dix années d'exil. This intellectual disposition, inherited from Montesquieu, was reinforced by her travels through Europe and her assiduous study of foreign cultures. Like her master, Mme. de Staël was intrigued by social diversity and dismayed by the narrow ethnocentrism of the French. An explicit purpose of her comparative studies was to penetrate France's "grande muraille de Chine." Her portraits of foreign cultures introduced new intellectual perspectives and contained detailed descriptions of the social and political institutions of unfamiliar societies. Nonetheless, they were also highly tendentious and linked to specific partisan objectives. Thus she proclaimed the English constitution as the criterion of good government; while her models of Italy, Germany and Russia served strategic roles in her campaign against Napoleon.

On a more abstract level, Mme. de Staël's uses of comparison embodied certain conflicting intellectual orientations which need to be clarified. The following perspectives are revealed in her writings:

1. Comparison to establish socio-cultural diversities:

Mme. de Staël's attempt to uphold the cultural distinctiveness of national societies against what she sensed to be a trend toward the cultural homogenization of Europe has

roots in her Montesquieuan inheritance and later nourished by her contacts with German nationalist thought. Already in De la littérature, where Montesquieu's influence predominates, she cautioned against the cultural imperialism of the Italians ("L'Europe, et en particulier la France, ont failli perdre tous les avantages du genie naturel par l'imitation des ecrivans d'Italie.").¹⁹ Later, in De l'Allemagne, she further stressed the importance of each nation's cultural self-expression, arguing that: a) only authentic national culture can claim aesthetic validity, and b) the grafting on of foreign cultures will deleteriously effect political and social stability.²⁰

2. Comparison to modify socio-cultural diversities:

If, on the one hand, Mme. de Staël feared the spread of a suffocating cultural uniformity, on the other, she was critical of exaggerated national differences. In such instances, she turned to comparison as a tool for modifying these differences by a mutual "balancing" or "checking" of national traits. In De l'Allemagne, for example, by exposing the "overly religious" Germans to the "excessively worldly" French, she proposed to moderate the pronounced tendencies of each nation, reconciling both on a cosmopolitan middle ground.

3. Comparison to illustrate a theory of historical progress

The theme that history is governed by general laws which reveal it to be advancing toward the realization of a univer-

sally valid type of society capable of realizing a universal human nature recurs throughout Mme. de Staël's major works. In Des circonstances actuelles, she distinguished two broad categories of society, the ancient and the modern, forecasting that modernity will universally be realized by a representative form of government and a corresponding form of social organization. A similar perspective informed the Considérations, in which three historical stages were distinguished. As in the previous category, comparison was again used to endorse "sameness," yet no longer as a corrective to an exaggerated national uniqueness, but rather as an ideal prescribed by historical law. Unlike the first approach, it appealed not to the richest expression of national character, but to the ultimate emergence of man qua man.

NOTES

¹Jean Touchard, ed. Histoire des idées politiques, Vol. II (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), p. 522.

²Mme. de Staël, Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution française, ed. Vienot (Paris: Fischbacher, 1904), p. 137.

³See G. Reynier, La femme au XVII^e siècle (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933).

⁴Voltaire, Lettres philosophiques, ed. by F.A. Taylor (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), p. 77.

⁵Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Regime and the Revolution (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), Part III, ch. I, passim.

⁶Quoted in Gwynne, Mme de Staël, p. 38.

⁷Jacques Necker, Sur l'administration de M. Necker par lui-même, in Oeuvres complètes, ed. Baron de Staël (15 vols; Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1820-21), VI, p. 43, quoted by Paul Palmer, "The Concept of Public Opinion in Political Theory," Essays in History and Political Theory in Honor of C.H. McIlwain (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 237.

⁸Des circonstances, p. 291.

⁹Mme. de Staël, Reflexions sur la paix intérieure in Oeuvres complètes (17 vols.; Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1820), II, p. 151. See also Steven Golin, "Mme. de Staël: Culture as Social Control," The Review of Politics (Fall, 1975), pp. 345-46.

¹⁰Des circonstances, p. 345.

¹¹See for example, Reflexions sur la paix intérieure, Part I, ch. 1 and Part II, ch. II.

¹²See Woloch, Jacobin Legacy.

¹³Alfred Cobban, "Political and Social Interpretations of the French Revolution," in Aspects of the French Revolution (N.Y.: George Braziller, 1968), pp. 264-74.

¹⁴Mme. de Staël, Considérations sur la Révolution française (2 vols.; Paris: Charpentier, 1862), I, pp. 227-30.

¹⁵Quoted in Kelly, "Liberalism," p. 517.

¹⁶On this point, see George Kateb, Political Theory (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1968).

¹⁷Mme. de Staël, De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations, in Oeuvres complètes, III, p. 255.

¹⁸Mme. de Staël, De l'Allemagne (5 vols.; Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1958), IV, p. 400.

¹⁹Mme. de Staël, De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales, in Oeuvres complètes, IV, pp. 243-44.

²⁰See De l'Allemagne, Part I, ch. XVI.

CHAPTER III:

HISTORICAL PROGRESS

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the concept of progress found in the writings of Mme. de Staël. Such an inquiry is valuable for a variety of reasons. Certainly the concept figured prominently in her thought, and it may fairly be argued that Mme. de Staël made several distinctive contributions to its theoretical development. It is of interest, too, that Mme. de Staël's concept of progress was formulated against the backdrop of the French Revolution. While this fact did not alter her fundamental allegiance to eighteenth century progressionist views, it both created certain contradictions in her thought and intensified those tensions already present in her intellectual tradition. Finally, Mme. de Staël often used the idea of progress to serve practical political purposes. These purposes contributed to shape her treatment of the concept, and hence need to be illuminated.

Mme. de Staël's concept of progress cannot be considered apart from the intellectual tradition that nourished it. It is indeed relevant to the authoress of De la littérature that the modern doctrine of progress had its

origins in the "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes," the celebrated seventeenth century debate over the comparative merits of classical and contemporary literature. For proponents of the Moderns, the terms of debate had already been set outside the literary sphere: Descartes and Pascal, citing the authority of reason and the accumulated lessons of experience, had proclaimed that man's knowledge must of necessity increase throughout the centuries. It was, however, the advance of scientific knowledge to which both thinkers referred. Indeed Pascal had carefully distinguished the provinces of "reason" and "authority;" assigning the realm of literature to the latter, he denied it the potential for progressive improvement.¹ Defenders of the Moderns, like Charles Perrault, rejected this dichotomy and sought to enlist arguments for the cumulative advance of man's knowledge in the service of the literary arts. Perrault founded his thesis on the assumption that nature was immutable; that, in consequence, men's aptitudes remained constant throughout history. He thus denied to the ancients any intrinsic superiority in talent or intellectual capacity, and went on to claim the pre-eminence of the Moderns on the basis of enlightenment gained through accumulated experience. "La nature est toujours la même en général dans toutes ses productions; mais les siècles ne sont toujours les mêmes; et, toutes choses pareilles, c'est un avantage d'être venu après les autres."² Where Perrault strayed from the position of Bacon and Descartes was in his assertion that literature,

like the sciences, was based on technique, and hence was similarly perfectible by the advance of knowledge, "Les anciens n'avaient pas toutes les règles que nous avons..."³ Ferrault, then, ventured an initial step in expanding the applicability of the concept of progress. The position of Fontenelle, a subtler proponent of the Moderns, was rather more complex: he contended that since literature was nourished by the imagination as well as by reason, it developed at a more rapid pace than the sciences, which required a long course of experimentation, and more quickly attained its perfection. Indeed in the realm of imaginative poetry, the achievements of the ancients could never be surpassed; "philosophical" poetry, however, would share in the advancement of knowledge, "Perhaps the time will come when poets will pride themselves on being more philosophical than poetic, more intellectual than talented..."⁴. Lastly, it is significant that neither Fontenelle nor Ferrault postulated a theory of uninterrupted literary progress. Both espoused a cyclical view of history in which periods of barbarism and ignorance alternated with periods of peace, enlightenment and progressive advance; from this perspective, they accounted for the superiority of classical over medieval literature.

These thinkers, then, laid the foundation for the concept of progress as it would be envisaged by the philosophes of the Enlightenment. They effected a break, albeit an incomplete one, with the cyclical theories of the ancients, as well as with the theological, though linear,

conception of time held by Christian thinkers. Retaining the idea of linear development, they argued that the vehicle of advancement was human initiative, specifically the increasing efficacy of man's powers of reason, rather than divine intervention. This advance occurred in a number of realms and at varying rates: they regarded scientific knowledge as the key to progress and, in the case of the Moderns, envisaged its application to the realms of literature and art. The thinkers of the Enlightenment would further widen the applicability of the concept to the realms of ethics and politics. Finally, if Perrault regarded his own era as the consummate expression of human achievement (thus implying that the term of progress had been spent, "I have the further joy of thinking that we shall probably not have much to envy in those who will come after us"),⁵ the philosophes would project their vision of man's perfectibility infinitely into the future.

In the eighteenth century, the idea of progress came to assume the status of a philosophy of history. Theories of historical flux and cyclical change, which continued to find expression in Enlightenment historiography, now generated tensions with the emergent conception of history as a process of linear advance in all fields of human endeavor. As envisaged by the philosophes, the idea of progress had a distinctively utilitarian cast. It no longer implied the hermetic perfection of the scientific method or artistic technique, but rather the advance of knowledge in the service of practical human needs and social reform. Achievements were accordingly evaluated in terms of their contri-

bution to human felicity. The notion that knowledge necessarily led to happiness represented a break from the earlier, less sanguine, views of Fontenelle. However, only in the works of the staunchest eighteenth century Enlighteners had Fontenellian skepticism entirely vanished. More commonly, eighteenth century progressionist thought was marked by qualifications, hesitations, and uncertainties. The position of D'Alembert is illustrative:

We hardly acquire any new knowledge without undeceiving ourselves about some agreeable illusion, and our enlightenment is almost always at the expense of our pleasures ... Still, we would not want to exchange our enlightenment for .. the ignorance of our ancestors. If this enlightenment does reduce our pleasure, it flattens our vanity at the same time, we congratulate ourselves for having become sophisticated, as though this is some sort of merit.⁶

The writings of a single thinker often revealed a doctrine of historical progress existing along with competing strands of philosophical pessimism and incompatible theories of history. Not only were theories of historical decadence and flux imported into eighteenth century thought, but, through the seminal influence of Montesquieu, there also emerged theories of historical relativism which challenged the progressionist assumption of universally valid historical norms. These tensions were carried over into the writings of Mme de Staël, complicating and confusing her conception of progress. For the present, however, let us consider the doctrines of Turgot and Condorcet, the thinkers to whom she owed her greatest debts.

Because Condorcet offered perhaps the most compre-

hensive theory of historical progress in the eighteenth century, we shall reverse chronological order and examine his works before turning to those of Turgot. Following the lead of earlier progressionist thinkers, Condorcet set as a precondition of historical progress the constancy and universal applicability of natural law:

Le seul fondement de croyance dans les sciences naturelles, est cette idée, que les lois générales, connues ou ignorées, qui régissent les phénomènes de l'univers, sont nécessaires et constantes; et par quelles raisons ce principe serait-il moins vrai pour le développement des facultés intellectuelles et morales de l'homme, que pour les autres opérations de la nature? ⁷

These laws, he argued, were accessible to human reason and contained the egalitarian norms of progressive development. Accordingly, progress was an autonomous human creation, initiated and sustained by the advance of human knowledge.⁸ Scientific knowledge was fundamental: it alone illuminated the truths which linked together all areas of human activity, "All errors in politics and morals have a basis in philosophical errors, which are themselves linked with errors in physics."⁹ On the basis of this understanding, Condorcet depicted history as the process of human enlightenment, periodizing it into ten distinct epochs in accordance with their relation to advances in human knowledge.

Although Condorcet maintained a linear conception of historical advance, he nonetheless drew a distinction between the nature of progress in the past and as it would be in the future: the former being characterized by a

checkered and halting pace; the latter, by a sustained, continuous and irreversible movement. His distinction, which turned on the historical role he attributed to the clergy, represented the first openly polemical use of the concept of progress. According to Condorcet, the progress of enlightenment in the past had been retarded by the self-seeking behavior of the clergy, a non-functional class which maintained itself in power by the deliberate propagation of error, superstition, and prejudice. Condorcet's historical tableau depicted a centuries old Manichean battle between the forces of ignorance and reason, with the latter slowly emerging triumphant. By examining the relation of the "interests" of the clergy to the progress of enlightenment, Condorcet had adumbrated a theory of "progressive" and "non-progressive" class interests¹⁰, which Mme de Staël would later exploit for her own ideological purposes. That progress would in the future be irreversible was, in part, a consequence of Condorcet's own unmasking of the clergy's sinister designs and, in part, a result of innovations like the printing press which made possible the keeping of permanent records and the dissemination of learning to the masses. Finally, the discovery of the scientific method guaranteed against retrogression. Because the experimental method was infinitely perfectible with practice, correcting itself through the accumulation of experience, the progress of enlightenment would eventually become self-directing and self-controlling.

On the assumption that the social and physical sciences shared a common foundation, Condorcet bequeathed to

his disciples a sweeping vision of the potentialities of social science. He called for the application of scientific methods to social and political questions and developed the discipline of "social mathematics" which entailed the use of statistical probability theory to predict the outcome of social events (Condorcet never clearly defined the meaning of the scientific method with regard to the relative importance of induction and deduction, experiment and mathematics).¹¹ His most influential work in this area dealt with the theory of voting. In the Essai sur l'application de l'analyse à la probabilité des décisions rendues à la pluralité des voix (1785), Condorcet argued that the correctness of a decision could be statistically estimated by a given majority vote. Underlying this argument are the twin assumptions that a) a correct decision exists, and b) voting is the mechanism by which it is made manifest.¹² Through the construction of statistical models, he set out to discover the size of the majority, in relation to given circumstances (e.g. the level of enlightenment of the voting body), necessary to secure the maximum probability that the collective vote will reveal the "true" solution. This aspect of Condorcet's thought enormously intrigued Mme de Staël, who reverently cited his theory of "social mathematics" in her De la littérature.

Despite the intense political struggle waged by Necker and Turgot over the Controller-Generalship of France, Mme de Staël bore Turgot no intellectual grudge and, in many respects, her writings on progress display a more

profound debt to her father's former rival than to Condorcet. Indeed considerable differences separated the conceptions of progress held by the two thinkers, yet they shared the following basic assumptions: both conceived of progress as a philosophy of history governed by invariable laws (however, Turgot explicitly referred to laws of "history" rather than laws of "nature," which he claimed followed a cyclical pattern); both regarded the advance of scientific knowledge as the vehicle of historical progress and assumed it applicable to other spheres of endeavor; both presupposed an intimate connection between the intellectual discovery of fundamental "truths," the implementation of practical reforms, and the spread of human felicity; both thinkers envisaged the future as an era of commerce, material abundance, international peace and domestic tranquility.

Turgot's most notable departure from Condorcet was his attempt to reconcile the concept of progress with the idea of Providence and the historical role of Christianity. Unlike Condorcet, whose rabid anti-clericalism drove him to purge all vestiges of theology from his arguments, Turgot maintained that Providence was an operative force in the historical process: not through direct intervention in human affairs, but rather as the beneficent creator of a rationally ordered and purposive universe, "The universe viewed in its totality, in the whole range of the progressions, is the most glorious spectacle, witness to the wisdom

which presides over it."¹³ For Turgot, all human endeavor was to be interpreted within this Providential design. Hence the immediate evil of private intentions was transcended by the larger beneficent purpose of history. This conviction formed the basis of Turgot's argument that, during certain historical periods, man's selfish passions operated on behalf of progressive advance:

And the ambitious themselves, in forming great nations, have contributed to the designs of Providence, to the progress of enlightenment, and thus to the increase in the happiness of the human race, with which they were not concerned at all. Their passions, even their fits of rage, have led them on their way without their being aware of where they were going ... Reason, which is justice itself, would not have taken away from anyone what belonged to him, would have banished war and usurpation forever, and would have left men divided up into a host of nations separated from one another and speaking different languages. As a result the human race, limited in its ideas, incapable of that progress in all kinds of understanding, in the sciences, arts and government, which takes its rise from the collective genius of different regions, would have remained forever in a state of mediocrity.¹⁴

Turgot's notion that the development of society was the unintended consequence of self-interested actions was also a key assumption of the Scottish Historical School with which Benjamin Constant was closely allied: its influence on Mme. de Staël's thinking was inescapable. In addition, Mme. de Staël would draw heavily on Turgot's demonstration of the "progressive" role of Christianity. His Discours sur les avantages que l'établissement du christianisme à procurés aux genre humain credited religion with the preservation of learning and the cultivation of reason during the Middle Ages, and for having tempered the primitive ferocity of the

Northern tribes by the teaching of compassion, charity and brotherly love. Within this context, Turgot appeared to lay equal stress on the reason and the sentiments. All these themes were to be further elaborated in the work of Mme. de Staël.

For all his faith in the inexorable advance of history, Turgot remained acutely aware of the permanent potentials for decline and decay. He realized that while men of genius were more or less evenly distributed throughout all historical periods and geographical areas, the development of their talents and the reception of their discoveries depended on the cultural milieu within which they operated. (This insight reflected the influence on Turgot of Montesquieu's theory of physical and moral causes.)¹⁵ Thus it followed that nations advanced at an uneven tempo in relation to their relative political, social and economic circumstances. As factors favorable or pernicious to the development of knowledge shifted, nations would accordingly mature or decline. These factors also served to differentiate the pace of progress within its various spheres, which Turgot distinguished as technology, speculative science, ethics and aesthetics. Anticipating Mme. de Staël, he wrote:

The sciences, which are based on the combination or knowledge of objects, are as boundless as nature. The arts, which are only relations to ourselves, are as limited as we are; in general all those which are carried on to give pleasure to the senses have a point at which they are unable to pass, determined by the limited sensibility of our organs.¹⁶

Mme. de Staël was a direct heir to the eighteenth century progressionist tradition. And in light of her seminal influence on Restoration liberal thought, she can be credited with having defined its intellectual contours for her later contemporaries. Recognition of Mme. de Staël's transitional role must necessarily undermine the prevailing view that Restoration liberalism manifested a sense of history unanticipated by the ahistorical perspectives of the Enlightenment. This argument was advanced by the Doctrinaires themselves and is echoed today in the work of Stanley Mellon.¹⁷ The Revolution did not, as Mellon contends, "awaken" the historical sense of the French liberals, but extended an already vital tradition of historical analysis to embrace the events of the recent past. Nor, as Mellon suggests, did Restoration liberals have to reach outside their tradition (i.e. borrow tactics from the conservatives) to enlist history for partisan purposes. The Turgot-Condorcet debate over the role of the clergy as a progressive or anti-progressive class foreshadowed the liberal defense of middle class interests. Mme. de Staël's legacy to the Restoration liberals cannot, then, be considered apart from the character of her theoretical inheritance: her eighteenth century background providing a key to the major themes and certain of the intellectual tensions transmitted in her historical writing.

Nevertheless, Mme. de Staël was historically separated from her earlier contemporaries by the events of the French Revolution. Thus before examining the concept of progress set out in her writings, it would be useful to assess the significance of this fact for her attitude of historical optimism. If the Revolution had dealt a lethal blow to progressionist principles in the minds of the conservatives, it had not had the same effects upon the liberals. Nor is this surprising. Proponents of progress had always to confront the harshness of empirical circumstances; invariably, their expositions of a rational structure of history were coupled observations of anomolous historical realities, which were either relegated to the sphere of accident or chance, or interpreted to conform to a progressionist framework (i.e. Turgot's theory of unintended consequences). This dualist tradition, combining rational analysis with heterogenous empirical observations, was continued by Mme. de Staël, for whom the idea of progress remained attractive as an intellectual and political resource despite the grim lessons of her historical experience. Indeed Mme. de Staël never completely abandoned the attitude of optimism conveyed in her adolescent essay Lettres sur Rousseau, in which she censured the Genevan philosopher for his sweeping rejection of the idea of progress.¹⁸

Yet it would be wrong to conclude that the Revolution posed no challenge to Mme. de Staël's faith in progress. It served, first, to aggravate certain strands of pessimism al-

ready present within the progressionist tradition. Thus together with more sanguine evaluations of the human condition, Mme. de Staël maintained that man's reason was forever incapable of bridling his destructive passions,¹⁹ that melancholy was the proper disposition of a free people,²⁰ that man's powers over his environment was severely limited,²¹ or that the attainment of personal happiness lied outside of man's reach. Second, it brought into bold relief certain of the intellectual tensions that characterized earlier progressionist thought. For example, Mme. de Staël's interpretation of the Terror as the ruthlessly mathematical pursuit led her to elaborate a theme already implicit in Turgot: the perfectibility of man's reason must be coupled with the development of his benevolent sentiments. Lastly, if her forebearers had largely ignored the possibility that improved technology and mass enlightenment could be exploited to debase rather than perfect men, Mme. de Staël's observations of the modern techniques of domination wielded under the Terror and by Napoleon alerted her to this prospect.

Despite these qualifications and hesitations, Mme. de Staël never entirely abandoned the concept of progress, although she variously reformulated it throughout her career. It was most fully explored in De l'influence des passions, Des circonstances actuelles, and De la littérature: all three works clearly reveal the influence of the Ideologues. During this period, Mme. de Staël espoused a sensationalist epistemology and maintained that historical pro-

gress was integrally linked to the advance of scientific knowledge (already in the Lettres sur Rousseau, she had underscored the progressive role of science).²² In De l'Allemagne the concept of progress did not loom large, and was disassociated from the idea of scientific perfectibility. It reemerged as a central thesis in the Considérations. In that treatise, Mme. de Staël focused on the stages of "political" progress, constructing a historical scheme that incorporated certain elements of her previous formulation, but drew in the main from other intellectual sources.

Like her eighteenth century predecessors, Mme. de Staël conceived of progress as a cumulative, albeit, unevenly paced, advance throughout all fields of human activity toward the universal realization of certain immutable and harmonious norms. As enumerated in De la littérature, these norms exemplified the ideals of the Enlightenment: "La liberté, la vertu ... les lumières, ce cortège imposant de l'homme dans la dignité naturelle, ces idées alliées entre elles, et dont l'origine est la même, ne sauraient exister isolement."²³ Her conception of progress was weighted heavily in the direction of social utility, focusing on the betterment of man's material condition throughout the course of history. On this basis, she placed England in the forefront of contemporary societies, "Que d'ouvrages entrepris pour servir utilement les hommes, pour l'éducation des enfans, pour le soulagement des malheureux, pour l'économie politique, la législation crimi-

nelle...."²⁴

For Mme. de Staël, the most fundamental type of progress was the advance of human knowledge which was the fruit of accumulated experience. Unlike Turgot, she minimized the role of genius, "Le génie le plus remarquable ne s'élève jamais au-dessus des lumières de son siècle, que d'un petit nombre de degrés."²⁵ Up to the period of her first German sojourn, Mme. de Staël maintained the primacy of scientific knowledge, especially as it related to increasing refinements in the scientific method. She based her position on a sensationalist epistemology which assumed that all ideas originated in man's sense experience of material reality.²⁶ This epistemological premise harbored the possibility of creating a "science des idées," by which an investigation of the laws governing material phenomena would yield a true picture of man's nature as well as suggest the principles according to which society must be ordered if that nature is to be fulfilled. In espousing this ideal, Mme. de Staël joined forces with the Ideologues:

La métaphysique tirée des objets positifs, la généralisation des idées exactes est le plus beau travail dont l'esprit humaine soit susceptible, mais la métaphysique du vague n'est qu'un écart de l'imagination. ²⁷

In De la littérature, Mme. de Staël spoke interchangeably of "la perfectibilité de l'esprit humaine" and "de l'espèce humaine": the former referred to advances in man's knowledge; the latter, to improvements in his social

condition.²⁸ Thus she shared the optimistic view, common to many thinkers of the Enlightenment, that the discovery of the truth was a sufficient guarantee of its ultimate triumph as social policy. And even after she turned her back on the scientific method, she retained her faith in the potentialities of human enlightenment. Hence she wrote in the Considérations: "Après une lutte et des malheurs plus ou moins prolongés le triomphe des lumières a toujours été favorable à la grandeur et à l'amélioration de l'espèce humaine."²⁹ At frequent intervals, however, Mme. de Staël punctuated these sanguine projections with more sober assessments of man's historical potentialities and limitations; always she remained alert to the qualitatively new form of domination made possible by advances in technology and education.

Mme. de Staël's conception of progress did not rest exclusively on her demonstration of the cumulative advance of human knowledge. With regard to the sphere of ethical progress, she appeared to be of two minds: on the one hand she affirmed the Ideologues' teaching that reason alone supplied man's moral values; and on the other, she upheld the Rousseauian view that morality was rooted in man's pre-reflective sentiments. From the latter perspective, reason still retained a function in that it discovered those social conditions which would allow for the fullest cultivation of man's natural sentiments. Thus she could link man's ethical development to the per-

fectibility of his reason, while maintaining that the standard of ethical conduct was emotive rather than rational. Yet as we shall see below, her schematization of ethical progress emphasized historical turning points -- the spread of Christianity and the development of the woman-centered family -- that were only indirectly related to the progressive course of reason. Moreover unlike the Ideologues, whose paeans to man's rationality left little room for his emotions, Mme. de Staël insisted that man's sentiments had an indispensable value without which the exercise of his reason was pernicious. This Rousseauian conviction, present in her earliest writings, was further encouraged by her experience of the Terror:

L'on a dit que, dans la révolution de France, des spéculateurs barbares avoient pris pour bases de leurs sanglantes lois, des calculs mathématiques, dans lesquels ils avoient froidement sacrifié la vie de plusieurs milliers d'individus, à ce qu'ils regardoient comme le bonheur du plus grand nombre. Ces hommes atroces, en retranchant de leur calcul les souffrances, les sentimens, l'imagination, croyoient le simplifier; ils ne se faisoient nulle idée de la nature des vérités générales.¹

Mme. de Staël acknowledged, however, that certain of man's non-rational attributes -- specifically, she singled out his passions and faculty of imagination -- had been either modified or eclipsed by the course of history, though she did not argue this position consistently. For example, classifying "glory" as a passion, she maintained that progress necessarily eroded the base of glory ("Chaque découverte des sciences, en enrichissant la masse diminue

l'empire individuel de l'homme ... la masse des hommes éclairés prend une sorte d'orgueil actif, destructeur des succès individuels"),³² while simultaneously insisting that glory be accorded a proper status within the framework of modern government ("... mais à côté du grand intérêt de l'avancement des lumières il faut laisser le but de la gloire individuelle. La république doit donner beaucoup plus d'essor que tout autre gouvernement à ce mobile d'émulation...").³³ Paradoxically, the very ambiguity of Mme. de Staël's concept of progress assured its continued intellectual vitality: her attempted synthesis of reason, sentiment, and passion; her re-evaluation of medieval Christianity combined with her espousal of the scientific method opened intellectual vistas to nineteenth century schools of thought as disparate as the positivists and the romantics.

Like all proponents of historical progress, Mme. de Staël relied on an a priori faith in the regularity and immutability of natural law. This assumption she linked to a conception of Providence not dissimilar to Turgot's, but nourished by her own Protestant heritage. She argued that the universe, as created by a benevolent Providence, was both purposive and rational; that historical events were only fully comprehensible from the broader perspective of God's design: "Ainsi le temps nous découvre un dessein dans la suite d'événemens qui sembloient n'être que le pur hasard."³⁴ Like Turgot, she set out a theodicy vin-

dicating Providence in the face of evil by appealing to ultimate divine purposes, while holding man personally responsible for his actions and accomplishments, "Il semble qu'une main divine conduise l'homme dans les recherches nécessaires à son existence, et le livre à lui-même dans les études d'une utilité moins immédiate."³⁵ If Providence designed the law-abiding process that made progress possible, it did not necessarily follow that all historical occurrences were fatefully pre-determined or that Providence intervened directly in human affairs. Accordingly, Mme. de Staël focused her analysis on the immanent historical forces of progress rather than on the divine context of their operations.

Thus despite the ambiguities often clouding her position, Mme. de Staël clearly regarded history to be meaningful, containing themes eminently relevant to her own time. This assumption she shared with her predecessors, though she shaped her inheritance in a manner more suggestive to her later contemporaries. Indeed Mme. de Staël merits recognition as a key figure in the transition from eighteenth to nineteenth century modes of historical inquiry. This link is ignored by Stanley Mellon who, in his "Introduction" to Francis Guizot: Historical Essays and Lectures, subscribes to Guizot's own thesis that nineteenth century liberal historiography emerged as the result of new perspectives opened up by the Revolution. Such an interpretation presupposes a distinct break between an ahistorical Enlightenment and a historically-minded Restoration. As I

have attempted to show, this dichotomy is essentially misinformed. For not only did the philosophes broaden the scope of what was considered historically significant, but they also formulated the principles of historical progress. Let us, however, pursue the matter in greater detail. Melton characterizes liberal nineteenth century historiography, which the writings of Guizot are held to exemplify, as being dually "committed" and "impartial." I shall examine each claim in turn, relating my inquiry to the intellectual and political position of Mme. de Staël.

Central to Guizot's historical perspective was his rejection of Einseitigkeit, or what he termed "the fault of seeing only one side of things."³⁶ According to Guizot it was essential that analysis be detached from the particular socio-economic interests of the historian and be based, instead, upon the rational standards implicit in the historical process itself. The historian who carried out a balanced or impartial investigation of the past (i.e. resting on the standard of truth embodied in the historical process) could not fail to reach a fuller and more adequate understanding of that process than his partisan colleagues, who, using erudition as a "party weapon," have "perverted or mutilated [facts], according to the interest or sentiment in favor of which they were summoned to appear."³⁷ He railed against sweeping historical value judgments, claiming that every age necessarily contained elements of legitimacy by dint of its contribution to the progressive course of his-

tory. A striking example of this point is provided by Guizot's critique of Kotzebue's History of Prussia, in which Guizot censured the author for failing to combine his condemnation of the bloody deeds of the Teutonic Knights with an appreciation of the positive historical role of Christianity (the Teutonic Knights being agents for the spread of Christianity to the East). Although Mellon describes Guizot's intellectual posture as "Hegelian,"³⁸ implicitly affirming the claim of Restoration liberals to have reached outside the ahistorical perspectives of their French forebearers, it is clear that the sources of Guizot's argument are located within the progressionist traditions of the French Enlightenment. Guizot's rejection of Einsseitigkeit may be viewed as a further and more explicit development of the eighteenth century progressionist assumption that history contained rational standards of evaluation which must serve as criteria for the historian. Similarly, Guizot's revaluations of historical episodes and individual actors were anticipated by Turgot who, from a progressionist perspective, distinguished between the motives and unintended consequences of men's actions, between private evil and historical good. The same strategy was often used by Condorcet, though Turgot's attempt to uncover elements of legitimacy in medieval Christianity brought him closer to Guizot's notion of "balanced" history. Mme. de Staël's further rehabilitations of the Middle Ages, the clergy, and the aristocracy are continuations of this tradition bearing directly on

Guizot's arguments. In addition, Guizot sometimes spoke of the need for the historian to achieve a "sympathetic" understanding of his subject. By this, he meant not that historical actors be judged on the basis of their unwitting roles in the historical process (as implied above), but rather that they be assessed in their capacity as independent individuals. On this basis, Guizot pleaded for the historian's benevolent appreciation of the complex nature of man, of the possibilities of uncovering good in even the most criminal dispositions. Hence Guizot's objection to Hallam's overly severe portrait of Strafford, "There were crimes in his conduct which laws could not touch; there were qualities in his character untouched by his crimes."³⁹ Again, Mme. de Staël's writings offer an intellectual precedent for Guizot's position in her attempt to synthesize a rationalist conception of history with an ethic of natural benevolence.

The peculiar paradox of Restoration historiography was that the very perspectives which cultivated scholarly detachment also nourished a patently partisan use of history by its liberal practitioners. The view of history as a rational process, harboring progressively realizable norms, suggested the polemical strategy of appealing to history as a source of legitimacy for those persons, social classes, events or institutions claimed to be vehicles of its advance or embodiments of its norms. Thus Guizot's emphasis on "balanced" historical understanding emerged as an

implicit justification of his doctrine of "le juste milieu," which sought an institutional compromise between the gains of the Revolution and the legacy of the Old Regime, and a social compromise between the aristocracy and the middle class. We have seen how the concept of progress had earlier been exploited polemically by Turgot and Condorcet: by the former, in his defense of the priestly class as an agent of progress; by the latter, in his condemnation of that class for its explicitly anti-progressivist interests.

It was Mme. de Staël, however, who more fully developed the partisan implications of the doctrine, anticipating many of the arguments of Guizot. Her attempts at consensus-building, for example, translated into a theory of historical progress which conferred legitimacy on the claims of all warring parties, but which, nonetheless, established clear historical priorities. Like Guizot, she regarded the middle class as the modern torchbearers of progress ("... c'est d'ordinaire dans cette troisième classe que les lumières se développent."),⁴⁰ arguing that their interests conformed to the objective norms of history. The claims of the nobility and the clergy were also to be accommodated by her historical scheme, though, in relation to the middle class, their status was clearly secondary. In De la littérature, she acknowledged that the institution of chivalry had served a useful historical purpose: "La chevalerie étoit nécessaire pour adoucir la ferocité militaire par le culte des femmes et l'esprit religieux."⁴¹ In the Considérations, she credited

the nobility as defenders of liberty in an age of absolutism. As for the clergy, Mme. de Staël affirmed Turgot's assessment of their positive historic role. She also invoked the idea of historical progress to either legitimate or discredit certain types of political arrangements. Thus she disposed of Jacobin democratic theory by labeling it "ancient," and deployed a similar strategy against the émigrés, characterizing their demands as anachronistic vestiges of an earlier stage of history. Against the Bonapartists, she used a somewhat different argument, claiming that the Napoleonic system was a modern perversion of the instruments of historical progress. Her own political recommendations, which will be examined in the following chapter, were legitimated by the claim that they were "modern" and in conformity to historical law.

To this point, I have examined the broad outlines of Mme. de Staël's doctrine of progress, and suggested the nature of its intellectual tensions, its historical significance and its theoretical contributions. I now turn to a more careful study of the doctrine, with a view to illuminating my preceeding observations. On close analysis, Mme. de Staël's doctrine of progress can be broken down to reveal several subordinate progressions which, following the enlarged historical perspective of the Enlightenment, purported to cover all areas of human activity.

1. Progress in the literary arts:

De la littérature may be characterized as a product of the seventeenth century "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes" as modified by the perspectives of the Enlightenment. The treatise combined a theory of literary progress not dissimilar to that of the "Modernes," with the socio-cultural mode of explanation so dear to eighteenth century thinkers:

Je me suis proposé d'examiner quelle est l'influence de la religion, des moeurs, et des lois sur la littérature, et quelle est l'influence de la littérature sur la religion, les moeurs, et les lois.⁴²

In her introduction to the work, Mme. de Staël acknowledged her intellectual indebtedness by proclaiming the novelty of her enterprise:

... il me semble que l'on n'a pas suffisamment analysé les causes morales et politiques, qui modifient l'esprit de la littérature. Il me semble que l'on n'a pas encore considéré, comment les facultés humaines se sont graduellement développées par les ouvrages illustres en tout genre, qui ont été composés depuis Homère jusqu'à nos jours.⁴³

In a certain sense, however, Mme. de Staël was justified in her protestations of originality. Not since the seventeenth century "Querelle" had subsided had attention been squarely focused on the question of progress in the literary arts. When Turgot and Condorcet took up the issue, it was not accorded a prominent place in their oeuvre. Indeed the idea of literary progress had been supplanted in the early eighteenth century by a revival of classicism (as evidenced in the works of Batteux)⁴⁴ and, contrariwise, by emergent tendencies towards aesthetic relativism (Dubos⁴⁵ and Marmontel⁴⁶). Both

aesthetic philosophies exerted an influence on Mme. de Staël, each distinctively compromising her theory of literary progress. Numerous passages in De la littérature invoke classical standards of judgment, and even more striking are her concessions to literary relativism. The latter tendency is revealed in the organizational framework of the treatise: Part I opens with an historical survey of the progressive development of literature through the various stages of Greek and Roman civilization, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. There then occurs a break in the structural continuity of the work as Mme. de Staël turns first to offer a broad distinction between the literature of the North and the South, and next to investigate the distinctive qualities of the Italian, Spanish, German and French literary traditions. Part II is devoted to a discussion of the nature and role of literature under an idealized French republic.

Despite the tensions generated by Mme. de Staël's eclectic acceptance of competing aesthetic theories, it was the idea of literary progress which she most consistently maintained and which had been the intended basis of her inquiry. Her account of literary progress was linked to a study of literature within the context of particular socio-cultural environments (Greece, Rome, medieval Christendom, etc.), each possessing an individual spirit or character. Literature, along with physical, social, political and religious causes, figured as a determinant of this spirit. No one cause singly determined the character of literary

endeavor: thus religion had the greatest influence on the tragic genre;⁴⁷ customs, specifically the rising social status of the woman, on the novel;⁴⁸ and form of government on comedy.⁴⁹ More often, however, Mme. de Staël hesitated to assign fixed relationships between literature and other causes, preferring instead to explore the manifold varieties of their interaction. While this perspective sometimes led Mme. de Staël to adopt relativist standards of evaluation, it served equally to nourish her theory of literary progress, which implied an historical movement toward the realization of universal norms of aesthetic excellence. From this view, she was concerned with a nation's socio-cultural context as it related to the development or acceptance of certain cherished literary forms and values. Hence a prerequisite of les écrits polémiques was the invention of the printing press and the spread of literacy;⁵⁰ the novel, "un genre presque inconnu aux anciens,"⁵¹ was rooted in a concept of privacy which emerged only with the spread of Christianity and the evolution of the domestic household; and modern aesthetic sensibility was alien to the austere culture of the ancients.

When examined in detail, Mme. de Staël's theory of literary progress is ambiguous and often contradictory. Much of the difficulty is attributable to the looseness of her definitions, a weakness immediately betrayed in the opening of the treatise:

... la littérature, considérée dans son acception la plus étendue; c'est à dire renferment en elle les écrits philosophiques et les ouvrages d'imagination,

tout ce qui concerne enfin l'exercice de la pensée dans les écrits, les sciences physiques exceptées.⁵²

The division between philosophical and imaginative literature served, in turn, to distinguish varying rates of development:

J'ai essayé de rendre compte de la marche lente, mais continuelle, de l'esprit humain dans la philosophie, et de ses succès rapides, mais interrompus, dans les arts.⁵³

As we have seen, this distinction had earlier been drawn by thinkers like Fontenelle, and Mme. de Staël did not hold to it consistently in practice. Turning to an examination of specific literary genres, she was unable to keep separate the realms of reason, imagination and sentiment. Indeed even her discussions of poetry and the beaux-arts, genres she ascribed exclusively to the realm of imagination, were plagued by confusion. She alternately maintained that a) the poetry of the Greeks could never be equalled since the imagination was incapable of recapturing the initial freshness of man's experience,⁵⁴ or b) the ancients could be rivaled by the moderns, especially under absolutist rule.⁵⁵ Lastly, she conceived of a distinct form of poetry, at once philosophical and sensible, which was the unique province of the moderns and hence infinitely perfectible.⁵⁶ That Mme. de Staël held these disparate positions simultaneously is indicative not simply of the undisciplined eclecticism of her mind, but also of the nature of the intellectual tradition to which she was heir. Even staunch modernists like Perrault had exempted poetry from their progressionist schemes; Turgot had later followed suit. Fontenelle, while proclaiming the

superiority of the ancients in imaginative literature, anticipated the rise of modern "philosophical" poetry. And philosophes like Helvetius⁵⁷ suggested a relation between political absolutism and the cultivation of a non-philosophical literature designed exclusively to amuse, flatter, or delight.

If Mme. de Staël contended that the poetic arts were subject to early exhaustion or joined to the erratic fortunes of absolutist regimes, she maintained that the other literary genres were capable of open-ended improvement. It remained unclear, however, whether such improvement was linked to the advance of man's reason or his sensibilities. A rationalist position, echoing that of Perrault, is suggested by Mme. de Staël's assessment of Greek tragedy:

Les tragédies grecques sont dont, je le crois, très inférieures à nos tragédies modernes, parceque le talent dramatique ne se compose pas seulement de l'art de la poésie, mais consiste aussi dans la profonde connoissance des passions; et sous ce rapport la tragédie a dû suivre le progrès de l'esprit humain.⁵⁸

Elsewhere, it was the development of man's emotional sensibilities that she stressed. Thus she argued that because the socio-economic preconditions of sensibilité had not yet emerged, the literary works of the Greeks and Romans were necessarily inferior to more contemporary efforts. This criticism applied equally to the tragic ("Dans les tragédies ... on est sans cesse frappé de ce qui manquoit aux affections du coeur, lorsque les femmes n'étoient point appelées à sentir ni à juger")⁵⁹ and the comic genres ("L'ex-

clusion des femmes empêchoit aussi que les Grecs ne se perfectionnassent dans la comédie").⁶⁰ When combined with the advance of reason, the progress of human sensibility would ultimately lead to a body of literature melancholy in tone, universal in subject matter, and utilitarian in effect. In theory, Mme. de Staël maintained that literature (excluding poetry and the beaux-arts) was infinitely perfectible to these ends; yet this assumption was undermined by her proposal that the works of Molière, Racine and Rousseau serve as models for future works of their genres.

Finally, the idea of progress set out in De la littérature was not unrelated to Mme. de Staël's political purposes. By discrediting the literary achievements of the ancients, she simultaneously disparaged the neoclassicism of the Jacobins. By heralding the advent of a utilitarian literature addressed to "l'homme de tous les pays et de tous les temps,"⁶¹ she similarly repudiated the aristocratic literary heritage of the absolutists.

2. Ethical progress:

Mme. de Staël devoted considerable attention to the theory of ethical progress. Its relation to the other progressions -- literature, science, politics -- was intimate, if characteristically ambiguous. In those literary genres that admitted of progressive improvement, perfectibility was linked to the increasing refinement of man's sensibilité, which, in turn, was a product of his ethical development.

In the realm of politics, the effects of ethical progress ranged from the emergence of global harmony among nations to the creation of a particularly modern standard of political liberty rooted in the notion of domestic privacy. For her theory of ethical progress, Mme de Staël drew on the writings of Turgot as buttressed by the emotionalist ethic of Rousseau. She carried further Turgot's revaluation of Christianity and the Middle Ages, and related ethical progress to the historical role of women and the structure of modern political society.

In her introduction to De la littérature, Mme de Staël ascribed to the realm of ethics an incremental and steady rate of development. However, this initial formulation was implicated contradicted by the analysis which followed. As suggested by her periodization of history, the tempo of progress was not even and gradual, but rather irregularly punctuated by historical breakthroughs to higher levels of development. Hence the disproportionate emphasis Mme de Staël placed on Medieval Christianity as a vehicle for the emergence of modern ethical thought.

For Mme de Staël, ancient and modern concepts of morality were distinguished by the fact that the former held moral principles to be external to the individual, while the latter recognized them as inhering in man's nature. Paganism demanded that the ancients exclude from moral discourse and indeed repudiate all sentiment and spontaneous emotion:

ils trouvoient effeminés tous les mouvemens involontaires at rougissant en les éprouver, ils ne s'attachoient point à les connoître dans eux-mêmes, ni dans les autres. L'étude du coeur humain n'étoit pour eux que celle de la force ou de la foiblesse .. 62

Although the separation of virtue and natural impulse was a weakness common to the ethical thought of both the Greeks and the Romans, Mme de Staël, affirming the necessary progress of history, argued that a kind of limited advance was perceptible in the moral philosophy of the later civilization. For the early Greeks, morality consisted of an oracle from the gods; Greek philosophers of later epochs confounded the ideal of contemplative wisdom with that of virtue. Under the Republic, the Romans enjoyed profounder moral insights than their predecessors, though following its collapse the course of ethical progress was retarded. Mme de Staël displayed little sympathy towards Epicurianism, "ce système est immoral."⁶³

Her assessment of Stoicism was equivocal: on the one hand, she judged it to be properly introspective and melancholy; on the other, she bristled at a philosophy that required too great a degree of self-discipline and ignored man's natural sympathy for his fellows, "Le bonheur des autres n'est point l'objet de la morale des anciens: ce n'est pas les servir, c'est se rendre indépendant d'eux, qui est le but principal de tous les conseils des philosophes." ⁶⁴

According to Mme de Staël's account, Christianity was the first moral force to recognize the inner man, to

found ethical behavior on spontaneous human sentiment. The most immediate effect of the Christian religion was to consummate the fusion of the Northern and Southern peoples achieved by the barbarian invasions. It tempered the bellicosity of the Northern tribes through its emphasis on charity and brotherly love. It overturned the austere moral precepts of classical antiquity, and substituted for them an ethical doctrine rooted in man's natural benevolence, "le principe de ce sacrifice dans la religion chretienne, c'est le dévouement à son Dieu ou a ses semblables, et non, comme chez les stoiciens, l'orgueil et la dignité." ⁶⁵

Of crucial importance to moral progress, was the role of Christianity in the social emancipation of women. Whereas in the Greco-Roman world women were considered as little more than elevated slaves, Christianity proclaimed the sanctity of marriage and the equality of the sexes before God. In the Northern tribes, women had been respected as the equal partners of their mates, yet because of the bellicose nature of their existence the idea of domesticity remained unknown. By diverting the energies of the Northern peoples from war, Christianity stabilized their domestic life enabling the pleasures of intimacy to be tranquilly tasted. The religion had afforded women an instrument of social ascendancy, "La législation de la vie civile se reforma selon les principes de la religion. C'est donc alors que les femmes commencerent à être de moitié dans l'association humaine." ⁶⁶ This fact was of key significance to the course of ethical progress, since in Mme de Staël's

view, the precepts of virtue were more immediately realized in woman's nature. The rise of feminine influence was thus essential to the cultivation of man's moral sentiments. With the improvement of women's social status, the home became a self-contained source of man's fulfillment. The domestic relationship, by expanding the spectrum of feeling and multiplying men's ties, developed the full potentialities of human nature:

La félicité de l'homme s'accrût de toute l'indépendance qu'obtint l'objet de sa tendresse: il peut se croire aimé; un être libre le choisit; un être libre obéit à ses desirs. Les aperçus de l'esprit, les nuances senties par le cœur se multiplièrent avec les idées et impressions de ses âmes nouvelles, qui s'essayaient à l'existence morale, après avoir longtemps languï dans la vie. 67

As more elaborate ties came to bind members of the household, domestic life was enriched: the complex dimensions of parental love supplanted the rigid expectations of filial obedience, and marital bonds were enhanced by the heightened sensibilities of the partners. The open-ended development of man's moral character thus hinged on the progressive enrichment of his private domestic relations. Indeed it is the primacy of the private realm which, for Mme de Staël, defined the modern era. We have already seen that this view informed her theory of literary progress. The release of feminine sensibilities not only contributed to the rise of the novel as a genre, but also provided "modern" authors with an ever expanding range of creative resources:

Les femmes ont découvert dans les caractères une foule de nuances que le besoin de dominer ou le crainte d'être asservies leur a fait

apercevoir: elles ont fourni au talent dramatique de nouveaux secrets pour emouvoir. Tous les sentimens auxquels il leur est permis de se livrer, la crainte de la morte, le regret de la vie, le dévouement sans bornes, l'indignation sans mesure, enrichissent la littérature d'expressions nouvelles. 68

Although Mme. de Staël's account of political progress will be treated separately, it is appropriate to comment here on its relation to her theory of ethical progress. The historical emergence of the private as the principal sphere of man's moral development had, in her view, signalled the demise of the political as an instrument of moral education. The ancient conception of political theory as active citizenship corresponded with circumstances peculiar to classical antiquity -- the intimate dimensions of the polis and the absence of any real family life. For the moderns, however, the vast expanse of the political unit excluded the possibility of direct participation in the affairs of state, and the growth of domestic society cultivated sentiments incompatible with those that thrived on the arousal of patriotic fervor. The valor which characterized the ancients was founded on love of country; the qualities now in ascendancy -- pity, sympathy, benevolence -- were clearly wedded to the rise of feminine influence. The idea of liberty which developed since the establishment of Christianity was, then, distinct from its earlier formulation, "La liberté des temps actuels, c'est tout ce qui garantit l'indépendance des citoyens contre le pouvoir du gouvernement."⁵⁹ This concept of modern liberty was also nourished by a second theory of ethical progress which

equated "modern" morality with enlightened self-interest. From this view, liberty was rooted in the need of rational egoists to engage in unrestricted economic pursuits:

Il n'y avait donc pas (in classical republics), comme dans nos grands états, une masse d'hommes paisiblement égoïstes, se moquant des insensés qui font parler d'eux et pouvant, à l'aide de tous les moyens individuels et de l'organisation actuelle du commerce et de la propriété, faire leur destinée à part des événements publics. 70

Yet unlike many of her colleagues, Mme de Staël never wholly endorsed an ethic of narrow self-interest. The economic dimensions of modern liberty were, for example, more thoroughly investigated by Benjamin Constant. Mme de Staël's distinctive contribution to the development of the concept remains her elaboration of a "domestic" model of society, with its focus on the cultivation of man's disinterested sentiments.

3. Scientific Progress:

Mme. de Staël's conception of scientific progress owed much to the Cartesian tradition outlined earlier in the chapter. She argued that scientific knowledge, because founded on man's accumulated experience, progressed at an even and gradual pace, was infinitely perfectible, and held the key to the all-encompassing process of historical advance. Yet her conception of scientific knowledge remained unclear. Its empirical and rational ingredients were never coherently sorted out; the roles of induction and deduction never clearly defined. With the Ideologues, she heralded the advent of "les sciences positifs" which, rooted in observation and experimentation, would repudiate the authority of metaphysics. And like them, she

assumed a priori the fundamental unity of all knowledge and the rationality of historical law.

Despite a theoretical framework which presupposed the incremental accretion of scientific knowledge, Mme. de Staël's account focused on three key historical moments. The first coincided with the pivotal episode of ethical progress -- medieval Christendom. The medieval Church, she argued, not only preserved the writings of the ancients but, in addition, sowed the seeds of historical inquiry by developing man's faculties of "abstraction" and "attention."⁷¹ Her analysis was greatly indebted to Turgot. She invoked his theory of unintended consequences, claiming that pernicious disputes over religious dogma were instrumental in cultivating the intellectual faculty of abstraction. She also agreed with Turgot that, in the early stages of history, man's passions performed a role analogous to reason: religious fanaticism had contributed to sustain the "attention" of the disputants. A tension between the ethical and the scientific legacy of Christianity would always be manifest in her writings.

Mme. de Staël distinguished the discovery of the printing press as the second major moment in the progress of the sciences. Its importance was twofold. First, by affording a permanent and widely disseminated record of man's achievements, the printing press ensured that the course of progress would be steady and irreversible:

Elle a presque entièrement affranchi les progrès de

l'esprit du hasard des circonstances et ... elle a transporté plus de ressources pour l'étude qu'il n'existait jadis au milieu des philosophes d'Athènes ... ce n'est ... que depuis l'imprimerie que, chaque degré parcouru étant assuré, on peut prévoir la suivant avec certitude.⁷²

Second, by enabling knowledge to be disseminated among the vast majority of men, the printing press effectively reshaped the unit of history, replacing the individual actor with the mass:

Apprenons chez eux (the ancients) l'histoire des individus, mais celle de l'espèce ne doit dater que de l'époque où les trésors du passé ont été mis à l'abri de l'avenir, où les richesses de la pensée ont été démocratisées ...⁷³

Mme. de Staël's predecessors had extolled the printing press for similar reasons; she distinguished herself from them by her alertness to the possibility that it could serve equally as an instrument of subjugation. Her praise of the invention was thus coupled with an unprecedented warning intended to discredit the methods of the Jacobins: "à l'aide de l'imprimerie -- qui n'est qu'un poison sans la liberté de la presse -- nous tenons d'une manière fixe la chaîne des idées."⁷⁴

According to Mme. de Staël, the discovery of the scientific method was at once the apotheosis of man's past achievements ("cette méthode n'est elle-même que le résultat de l'ensemble des connaissances et des réflexions humaines")⁷⁵ and the vehicle of his future advancement. With the Ideologues, she maintained that the experimental method of the physical sciences would disclose the fundamental unity of all knowledge, free the mind from the distortion of passion and prejudice, and provide the lawgiver with a set of "veri-

fied" sociological and moral truths:

... c'est à l'étude des sciences physiques que l'on doit cette rectitude de discussion et d'analyse qui donne la certitude d'arriver à la vérité lorsqu'on le desire sincèrement ...⁷⁶

Yet for all the historical weight she placed on the method, Mme. de Staël displayed little more than a dilettantish familiarity with its basic assumptions. In effect, her only detailed description of the method was a recapitulation of Condorcet's theory of the social calculus:

Le calcul des probabilités, quand il s'applique à un très grand nombre des chances, présente un résultat moralement infaillible... si vous admettez cent mille chances, si vous calculez d'après cent mille hommes pris par hasard, vous saurez, par une approximation juste, quelle est dans ce nombre la proportion des hommes éclairés, des hommes foibles, des scélérats et des esprits distingués ... En joignant à ce calcul la connoissance éprouvée des effets de telle ou telle institution, l'on pourroit fonder les pouvoirs politiques à peu près certaines ...⁷⁸

Other than to endorse its general tenets to her readers, Mme. de Staël contributed little to the actual development of positivist theory. The interest of her account lies instead with the tension it generated with that strain of her thought linking ethical behavior to man's pre-reflective sentiments as related to his individual circumstances (rather than to rationally apprehended "facts" capable of universal application, "les forces morales sont calculées par les lois aussi positives que les forces physiques").⁷⁹ Sometimes Mme. de Staël perceived this tension, "La morale doit être considérée dans l'homme comme une inclination ... elle est fille de création, et non d'analyse."⁸⁰

She recognized that the unit of analysis in each domain was distinct: in ethics, it was the individual; in social calculus, the mass. The former dealt in unique events, in particular circumstances; the latter, in generalities, approximations and abstractions:

... ce calcul ne peut se fonder que sur un très grand nombre de faits, desquels vous pouvez extraire un résultat approximatif ... mais la morale a pour but chaque homme en particulier, chaque circonstance ...⁸¹

In De l'influence des passions Mme. de Staël remarked upon the distinctive content of the norms governing each realm. Accordingly, she depicted two qualities of happiness: one appropriate to nations; the other, to individuals:

Un grande différence, cependant, existe entre le système du bonheur de l'individu et celui de bonheur des nations; c'est que dans le premier, on peut avoir pour but l'indépendance morale la plus parfait, c'est-à-dire l'asservissement de toutes les passions, chaque homme pouvant tout tenter sur lui même; mais que, dans le second, la liberté politique doit toujours être calculée, d'après l'existence positive et indestructible d'une certaine quantité d'êtres passionnés, faisant partie du peuple qui doit être gouverné.⁸²

Yet her obvious sensitivity to the distinctions involved did not prevent Mme. de Staël from demanding that the two orders be reconciled:

La morale doit diriger nos calculs, et nos calculs doivent diriger la politique ... cette place que nous assignons à la morale, au-dessus du calcul, convient également à la morale publique et à la morale individuelle ... tout doit être soumis, en dernier ressort, à la vertu ...⁸³

The assumptions implicit in the above passage -- a) that one could move from contingent questions of individual morality to a general scheme of social morality without major con-

ceptual readjustments and b) that both realms were intrinsically harmonious -- were, by Mme. de Staël's own admission, untenable.

The presence of these incompatible strands can be attributed, in part, to Mme. de Staël's intellectual heritage combining the teaching of Rousseau and Condorcet, and, in part, to her political situation. Given that situation, each strand had a strong appeal. Her account of the progressive development of man's sensibilité was used to discredit the ruthless calculations of the Jacobins and, more generally, to temper the passions of all hostile parties. On the other hand, her espousal of a "positive science" of morality served her consensus-building efforts: by presenting a "scientific" vindication of the ordering principles of the Thermidorean republic, she placed hors de débat all competing political values.

4. Political Progress:

While earlier defenders of progress had either denied the applicability of the concept to the sphere of politics (this being especially true of seventeenth century thinkers) or accorded it only a brief treatment, the idea of political progress emerged as a key theme of Mme. de Staël's writings. Her own political activity was an important factor in accounting for the crucial place it occupied in her work, as well as for the various formulations it received. In the works of her middle period several models of political pro-

gress may be distinguished: the "scientific" model; the "ancient/modern" model; the "military/pacific" model. In the Considérations, she presented a three-stage scheme of political development. While all these models shared certain elements in common, each offered a distinctive angle of vision and each was directed towards specific partisan ends. From this view, it is particularly instructive to compare the "ancient/modern" model of her post-Thermidorian period to the three-stage model of the Considérations. The former, intended to stigmatize the political aims of the Jacobins, erected an historical dichotomy between the Jacobin vision of classical antiquity and the moderate vision of modern commercial society. The latter, written under a different set of political circumstances (during the early years of the Restoration, the reactionary aristocracy had replaced the Jacobins as the principal threat to Mme. de Staël's vision of order), omitted all reference to classical antiquity. Focusing instead on the historical claims of the nobility, it took as its starting point the period of feudalism and proceeded through the era of representative government. Both models offered historical vindications of Mme. de Staël's cherished values: civil liberty and middle class rule.

(Because the "scientific" model of political progress has been treated in the preceding section, it is here omitted.)

The ancient/modern model:

This model of progress was designed as a weapon to

counter Jacobin political ideology. Mme. de Staël formulated the model in collaboration with Constant, who later enlisted a more detailed version of it against Napoleon.⁸⁴ In Mme. de Staël's own writings, it appears in embryo in Réflexions sur la paix intérieure, and more fully developed in Des circonstances actuelles; there are also allusions to it in De la littérature, and later in De l'Allemagne. Framed as a polemical weapon, it took no account of the profound shifts in the Jacobin position under Thermidor or the subtleties of Jacobin political theory. Nonetheless the model struck at the central tenets of Jacobinism: its commitment to "civisme," popular participation in government and equality, as well as its penchant for classical models of democracy. Indeed it was this last feature which suggested the grounds for Mme. de Staël's indictment. As a proponent of the doctrine of progress, Mme. de Staël could not condone a theory of government that refused to recognize the gains of history and opted instead to revive concepts discredited by the passage of time. Her strategy was to illustrate this anachronism by identifying and contrasting those characteristics peculiar to ancient and modern societies.

Mme. de Staël posited liberty as the organizing concept of her typology. Her purpose was to distinguish the type of liberty appropriate to ancient and modern societies, as related to the distinctive social and geographical conditions of each. It will be recalled that Mme. de Staël de-

defined ancient liberty as participation in the decisional process of the political community; a dynamic and selfless ideal, it rested on the assumption that man was entirely monopolized by his collective existence. This concept of liberty corresponded with circumstances peculiar to ancient society: intimate geographical dimensions, the absence of domestic life (so long as woman suffered an inferior status, the gratifications of domestic life would remain secondary to the rewards of active civic involvement, rewards which ensued from participation with one's equals in the affairs of state), a low level of technology and a rudimentary economy. The most immediate sources of Mme. de Staël's argument were Rousseau and Mably, whose interpretations of antiquity the Jacobins at once embraced and modified.⁸⁵ She also derived much from Montesquieu, who had designated civic virtue as the animating passion of the classical republic and investigated the physical and social causes that contributed to sustain it.⁸⁶

By contrast, Mme. de Staël identified the liberty of the moderns as "tout ce que garantit l'indépendance des citoyens contre le pouvoir du gouvernement."⁸⁷ This negative concept of liberty corresponded, in turn, to those traits Mme. de Stael designated as characteristic of modern society: national units of vast territory (inhibiting direct participation in political decision-making), domestic arrangements based on sexual equality, technology capable of producing material abundance, highly developed patterns of

trade and commerce. These factors contributed to the formulation of ideas inconceivable to the ancients: the separation of the political from the social, the concept of privacy, and the recognition of the individual as a unit of material gratification and moral development. Not only were these views "different" from those held by the ancients, they were, according to Mme. de Staël's progressionist theory of history, qualitatively "better:"

C'est un grand bien ... pour la majorité des hommes, que cette possibilité d'exister isolément des affaires publiques; ce repos inconnu aux anciens, c'est l'avantage des grandes associations d'hommes, c'est une chance de plus de bonheur donnée à la diversité des caractères. 88

I have already noted a central tension in Mme. de Staël's vision of modern society, namely whether its essential spring was the passive self-interest engendered by the spirit of commerce or the selfless virtue born of domesticity. This distinction was glossed over in her writings, due to the fact that each principle was equally capable of buttressing her most cherished value -- negative liberty. and it is not irrelevant to Mme. de Staël's role as an apologist for the Thermidorians that both commercial freedom and domesticity were values dear to the emergent middle class elite. By representing the bourgeoisie as standard-bearers of a value-loaded concept of modernity, she proclaimed the universality of their interests and defended the legitimacy of their rule.

The military/pacific model:

This model was not elaborately developed by Mme. de Staël, although it is significant as an anticipation of Constant's extended treatise, De l'esprit de conquête et de usurpation, and of the related theories of Tocqueville and Spencer. Mme. de Staël's typology drew inspiration from the writings of earlier progressionist thinkers. Turgot regarded the passions (including military spirit) as befitting an early stage of historical development, but properly supplanted by reason in the modern era; Condorcet heralded the emergence of "l'harmonie internationale;" and the Scottish historians maintained that the development of commerce and industry would render it unlikely for men willingly to exchange material comfort for military glory. Mme. de Staël consolidated these arguments to her own political ends: in Des circonstances actuelles, her intention was to discredit the militaristic policies of the Directory; in the Considérations, her target was Napoleon. The earlier work offered a neat series of contrasts between military and modern (pacific) societies: the former requires a perpetual state of emergency, the latter provides for legislation through established channels (".. tout ce qui assure les triomphes de la guerre est subversif du règne de la loi");⁸⁹ the former rests on submission by force, the latter in consent ("... l'esprit militaire explique tout, march à tout par la force ... la liberté fonde l'autorité sur la conviction ...");⁹⁰ the former glorifies individual sacrifice, the latter, cooperative

endeavor ("... l'esprit militaire sacrifie les hommes, la liberté multiplie leurs liens entre eux...").⁹¹

The three-stage model:

The three-stage scheme of progress presented in the Considérations contains notable departures from Mme. de Staël's dichotomous models, although the extent of her break with these earlier formulations should not be overestimated. The shift in her angle of vision can be related to the political circumstances under which the Considérations was composed. During the early years of the Restoration, Mme. de Staël's principal political opponents had become the reactionary aristocracy. Their demands for a return to the arrangements of the Old Regime directly countered her own efforts to legitimate the "gains" of the Revolution. As she had with the Jacobins, Mme. de Staël asserted her political claims by means of historical disputation. However, the distinct nature of her aristocratic opponents' arguments led her to emphasize different historical periods (feudalism replaced classical antiquity as the focus of her attention) and draw upon a separate tradition of theorizing.

As in her earlier writings, liberty emerged as Mme. de Staël's prime value in the Considérations, and again served as the cornerstone of her historical periodization. However, the concept of ancient liberty no longer figured in her account, which now centered exclusively on the course of "modern" history. Consistent with her previous formu-

lations, Mme. de Staël dated the modern era from the time of the Northern invasions. Although she now subdivided it into three successive stages: feudalism, despotism and representative government. These arrangements were, in turn, distinguished according to the degree of liberty secured by each: feudalism provided partial liberty; despotism, no liberty; and representative government, liberty to all citizens. The schema was patently Europocentric, with England representing the prototype of modern society. The particular circumstances of each nation, Mme. de Staël contended, would determine the pace of its evolution: thus Germany and Hungary presently remained feudal states; France, Italy and Russia, despotisms. In contrast to the linear conception of history set out in her earlier works, the schematization in the Considérations was dialectical, positing the "contradiction" as the mechanism of historical movement.

For political reasons, Mme. de Staël's characterization of feudalism drew on French experience. She depicted it as a system of limited monarchy, introduced by the Frankish conquerors of Gaul, in which the power of the Crown was curbed by the privileges of the nobility:

La première période politique est celle où les nobles, c'est-à-dire les conquérants, se considéraient comme les copartageants de la puissance royale de leur chef, tandis que la nation était divisée entre les différents seigneurs, qui disposaient d'elle à leur gré.⁹²

The independence of the nobility, whom she described as descendants of the victorious Franks, was secured through the institutions of hereditary fiefdom, elective monarchy, and

the Champs de Mars and Champs de Mai. The commons had no share in these liberties, nor had they begun to cultivate those talents that would later fix their ascendancy, "Il n'y avait ni instruction, ni industrie, ni commerce; la propriété foncière était presque la seule connue."⁹³ Under feudalism, then, the enjoyment of liberty was confined exclusively to the noble class:

Tout démontre que dans ces temps les grands seigneurs étaient très-indépendants des rois; ils maintenaient la liberté pour eux, si toutefois on est libre soi-même alors qu'on impose la servitude aux autres.⁹⁴

Although its restricted conception of freedom condemned the ancient constitution in Mme. de Staël's eyes, she nonetheless conceded that it contained anticipations of the liberal form of government she cherished, "c'est la liberté qui est ancienne, et le despotism qui est moderne."⁹⁵

Mme. de Staël traced the emergence of the despotic system to the feudal struggle between the crown and the nobility. To defend their power against encroachment by the nobles, monarchs began to turn to the commons as a source of military aid and economic support:

Les troupes réglées rendirent l'assistance des nobles moins nécessaire; le besoin des impôts, au contraire, força les souverains à recourir au tiers état; et pour en obtenir des tributs directs, il fallut qu'ils le dégagassent plus ou moins de l'influence des seigneurs.⁹⁶

As a result of this alliance, the prerogatives of the nobility were eventually undermined and the partial freedom guaranteed by feudal institutions abolished:

Il s'agit seulement de remarquer que les nobles, dans le temps de leur splendeur, avaient un genre de liberté

politique, et que le pouvoir absolu de rois s'est
 établi contre les grands avec l'appui des peuples.⁹⁷

The concentration of political, economic and military power in the hands of the sovereign gave rise to the despotic system, which attained its consummate form under Louis XIV. Mme. de Staël defined despotism as "la réunion dans les mains d'un seul du pouvoir exécutif et du pouvoir législatif tout ensemble."⁹⁸ It connoted arbitrary rule, as well as a distinctive type of obedience resting on fear. In France, this mode of domination was challenged by the libertarian spirit of Protestantism and by the claims of the parlements and the Estates as heirs to the feudal assemblies, le Champs de Mars and le Champs de Mai. A more fundamental challenge to the despotic system arose from the very circumstances of its birth, namely, its alliance with the tiers. Mme de Staël again drew upon the theory of unintended consequences to argue that the chief beneficiary of despotic power was that class whose interests it diametrically opposed. By encouraging the talents and stimulating the political awareness of the commons for the purpose of enlisting these resources against the nobility, the despot unwillingly served to cultivate progressive forces -- the spread of enlightenment, the rise of public opinion, the growth of commerce, industry, etc. -- inherently hostile to the arbitrary character of his regime.

Representative government, presented by Mme. de Staël as the highest stage of political progress, resolved the inner contradictions of the despotic system. It was

that form of government which recognized the political claims of the tiers, and transcended the partial liberty of feudalism to secure it as a value for all citizens. It incorporated the principles of mixed government (a two-chambered legislature reflected the interests of the aristocracy and the tiers), the separation of powers, and the rule of law, its characteristic mode of obedience was consent, rooted in a judicious balance of reason and tradition. Finally it was a distinctively "modern" form of government. As its principal value was negative liberty, it presupposed the existence of an intricately developed social of "private" sphere. Because public opinion formed the basis of its operations, it counted on a literate and enlightened citizenry. The establishment of the representative system was, according to Mme de Staël, the goal of both the English and French revolutions; whereas French efforts had gone awry (for reasons to be examined in Chapter Five), the English had succeeded in attaining "le dernier perfectionnement de l'ordre sociale." 99

The scheme of political progress outlined in the Considérations is at once suggestive and ambiguous: suggestive in its broad anticipations of Marx and its more immediate legacy to Guizot; ambiguous in its conceptualization of historical change, its vacillation between particularistic historical examples and universal formulas, its ill-defined political types, and its arbitrary periodization of history. These difficulties are explained, if not dispelled, by an examination of Mme. de Staël's political position, and of the tradition of partisan theorizing that

sustained her intellectual efforts.

What was politically at issue in the Considérations was the acceptance of the limited constitutional monarchy embodied in the Charte (which closely approximated her model of representative government) by an aristocracy intent on restoring the order of the Old Regime. To defend the Charte, and by implication the Revolution, Mme. de Staël appealed to her aristocratic opponents in tones that were alternately conciliatory and critical. This twin approach is immediately visible in her treatment of feudalism: while Mme. de Staël ultimately rejected the ancient constitution as a basis for contemporary political arrangements, she nonetheless recognized in it an affirmation of the historical claims of the nobility. Indeed, in a major concession to the aristocrats, she formulated her own concept of feudalism from models earlier developed by proponents of the thèse nobiliaire. Let us examine the intellectual foundations of this strategy.

The question of the historical origins of the French monarchy, had for many centuries, been the focus of intense partisan controversy. The dispute centered about two rival doctrines -- the thèse royale and the thèse nobiliaire, each offering a distinct theory of the French monarchy on the basis of separate readings of historical precedent. Eighteenth century defenders of the thèse royale, like the Abbe Dubos, Voltaire, and d'Argenson, set out an absolutist conception of the monarchy. Utilizing

historical evidence as a standard of legitimacy, they traced the absolute power of the King to his right as heir to the Imperium Romanum and, on this basis, repudiated the claims of the nobility to share in the exercise of political power through the organs of the parlements and the Estates. Proponents of the royalist position regarded these institutions as obstacles to social reform. They argued that an efficient government and a prosperous state required the uninhibited exercise of royal power. The opposing thèse nobiliare was the product of a complex intellectual tradition: Huguenot, feudal, and magistral theories of resistance to royal absolutism all figured in its development. Like their opponents, champions of the thèse nobiliare turned to historical argument to defend their version of the French constitution, in which the prerogatives of the crown were limited by the hereditary privileges of the nobility. In this seminal treatise,¹⁰⁰ Boulainvillers depicted the nobility as descendants of the Frankish conquerors of Gaul, stigmatizing the centralization of royal power as a "despotic" usurpation of the ancient liberties introduced by Frankish warriors. Boulainvillers had further argued that the enslaved Gauls were the ancestors of the roturiers. However, on this point he was prophetically challenged by Montesquieu (perhaps the most outstanding eighteenth century proponent of the thèse nobiliare), who admonished him for "un conjuration contre le tiers-
etat".¹⁰¹ Boulainvillers' account was later more vehemently repudiated by such committed defenders of the Third

Estate as Mably and Sieyès (".. the Third must not fear to go back into past times").¹⁰² Similarly, Mme de Staël disputed Boulainvilliers' political dismissal of the tiers, "La question toutefois est de savoir si les vingt-trois millions neuf cent mille âmes qui composent maintenant le tiers état en France ne sont en effet et ne veulent être que les Gaulois vaincus."¹⁰³ Nonetheless, she conceded to the aristocrats the key tenets of the thèse nobiliaire: the Germanic theory of French origins, the liberal version of the ancient constitution (a monarchy limited by the prerogatives of the nobility), the historically privileged status of the parlements and the estates, and the concept of despotism with which they stigmatized the absolutists. Indeed her acknowledgement of the past devotion of the nobility to liberal values led her to demand that their historical claims be constitutionally guaranteed by an aristocratic upper chamber. Yet Mme. de Staël's political priorities -- the defense of the Revolution and the "progressive" interests of the tiers -- prevented her from subscribing uncritically to the aristocratic position. To extricate herself from this dilemma, she devised an ingenious, if confused, intellectual strategy: she offered to reconcile the aristocratic appeal to historical precedent with her own concept of historical progress. Both sorts of appeal were rooted in a similar confusion of abstract normative standards and empirical history. But whereas the appeal to precedent was retrospective in focus, the appeal to progress enlisted a forward looking standard

of legitimacy. These logical and temporal distinctions were merged in Mme. de Staël's polemics. Thus she simultaneously praised the aristocracy for their historical defense of liberty, and condemned them for their narrow interpretation of a value that would be only fully realized in a later stage of historical development. The claims of the past must legitimately be taken into account, yet the aristocracy could continue to deny the gains of the Revolution (i.e. the extension of liberty to the tiers) only at the cost of ignoring the laws of historical progress, i.e. of becoming an anti-progressionist class. If Mme. de Staël was less than successful at achieving an intellectual synthesis of the two modes of eighteenth century historiography, she must, nonetheless be admired for her efforts, as well as credited for having formulated a political strategy so suggestive to later thinkers like Guizot.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to recall Stanley Mellor's thesis that the historical perspectives of Restoration liberalism were unanticipated by the Enlightenment. This chapter has attempted to show that historical argument -- whether framed as an appeal to progress or precedent -- figured significantly in the thought of such diverse yet characteristic Enlightenment thinkers as Montesquieu, Voltaire, d'Argenson, and later Mably and Sieyès. Mme. de Staël's views, like those of her Restoration disciples, represent a continuation and adaptation of eighteenth century "liberal" perspectives, rather than an intellectual departure marked by borrowings from an alien "conservative"

tradition.

It is not easy to summarize Mme. de Staël's idea of progress. It took shape not as an integrated concept, but rather as a set of heterogeneous models and formulations. It embodied a variety of intellectual tensions, with Mme. de Staël alternating her emphasis between the perfectibility of reason and emotion, material well-being and moral humanity, science and ethics. The concept of progress was combined with competing historical perspectives, and often nearly displaced by them. Ironically, the ambivalence of the concept contributed to preserve Mme. de Staël's legacy, making it available to disparate schools of thought.

Notwithstanding these logical confusions, Mme. de Staël made several distinctive contributions to the theory of historical progress. She was among the earliest progressionist thinkers to recognize a potential for perversion in the technology of modernity (the following chapter will offer a more detailed investigation of this theme). She may be credited for her focus on the historical role of women, her emphasis on the realm of political progress, her revival of the theory of literary progress, and her positive reassessment of the middle ages. Finally, she merits attention for having shaped the concept of progress as a partisan political weapon: whereas it had previously served polemical purposes in a literary dispute and later in a debate over the merits of Christianity, it remained for Mme. de Staël to suggest the concept's strategic

political implications for liberal thinkers under the
Restoration.

NOTES

¹Nathan Rotenstreich, "The Idea of Historical Progress," History and Theory, X, No. 2 (1971), pp. 202-3.

²Charles Perrault, Parallèles des anciens et des modernes quoted in A. Lagarde and L. Michard, XVII^e Siècle (Paris: Edition Bordas, 1963), p. 435.

³Ibid.

⁴Fontenelle, Sur la poésie en général, Oeuvres, III (Paris: 1790-92) quoted in Henry Vyverberg, Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 41.

⁵Perrault, Parallèles, quoted in John Passmore, The Perfectibility of Man (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 198.

⁶Alembert, "Réflexions sur l'usage et sur l'abus de la philosophie dans les matières de goût," Mélanges, IV, quoted by Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, II (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 102.

⁷Condorcet, Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humaine (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1966), p. 253.

⁸Frank Manuel, The Prophets of Paris (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 64.

⁹Quoted in Charles Verecker, Eighteenth Century Optimism (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1967), p. 284.

¹⁰See Charles Frankel, The Faith of Reason (N.Y.: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 151.

¹¹Walter Simon, "Positivism in Europe to 1900," Dictionary of the History of Ideas, 1973, Vol. III, p. 533.

¹²Giles Gaston Granger, "Condorcet," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1968, Vol. III, p. 214.

¹³Turgot, Plan de deux discours sur l'histoire universelle, I, Schelle edition, p. 285, quoted in Manuel, Prophets, p. 48.

¹⁴Turgot, On Universal History, trans. and ed. by Roland Meek, Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 69-70.

- ¹⁵See below, p. 141.
- ¹⁶Turgot, Meek, p. 113.
- ¹⁷Stanley Mellon, The Political Uses of History (Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), chs. I and II.
- ¹⁸Mme. de Stael, Lettres sur les écrits et le caractère de J.J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, I, p. 13.
- ¹⁹Passions, pp. 40-1.
- ²⁰Littérature, p. 317.
- ²¹Passions, p. 255.
- ²²Lettres, p. 13.
- ²³Littérature, p. 45.
- ²⁴Ibid., pp. 327-28.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 212.
- ²⁶On this theme, see George Lichtheim, The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays (N.Y.: Random House, 1967), pp. 4-11.
- ²⁷Des circonstances, pp. 196-97.
- ²⁸Littérature, "Preface."
- ²⁹Considérations, I, p. 5.
- ³⁰Frankel, Faith, p. 81.
- ³¹Littérature, p. 457.
- ³²Passions, pp. 55-56.
- ³³Littérature, p. 457.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 189.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 178.
- ³⁶See Stanley Mellon, "Introduction" to François Guizot: Historical Essays and Lectures, ed. by Stanley Mellon
- ³⁷Ibid., p. xxi.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. xxix.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. xxx.

⁴⁰Mme. de Staël, Dix années d'exil (Paris: Bibliothèque 10:18, 1966), p. 192.

⁴¹Littérature, p. 210.

⁴²Ibid., p. 25.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Charles Batteux, Les beaux arts réduit à un même principe (1746).

⁴⁵Jean Baptiste Dubos, Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture (1755).

⁴⁶Jean-François Marmontel, Éléments de littérature in Oeuvres (1767).

⁴⁷Littérature, p. 114.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 216.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 110.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 183.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 216.

⁵²Ibid., p. 27.

⁵³Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 83.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 165.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 503.

⁵⁷On this point, see Judith Shklar, Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 80.

⁵⁸Littérature, p. 103.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 102.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 114.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 486.

⁶²Ibid., p. 151.

⁶³Ibid., p. 166.

- 64 Ibid., p. 204.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid., p. 202.
- 67 Ibid., p. 203.
- 68 Ibid., pp. 216-17.
- 69 Des circonstances, pp. 94-95.
- 70 Ibid., p. 92.
- 71 Littérature, p. 207.
- 72 Des circonstances, pp. 192-93.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Littérature, p. 515.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 Ibid., p. 520.
- 78 Ibid., p. 522.
- 79 Des circonstances, p. 194.
- 80 Littérature, p. 540.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Passions, p. 14.
- 83 Littérature, pp. 534-35.
- 84 Benjamin Constant, De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation dans leurs rapports avec la civilisation européenne (1813).
- 85 See Harold Parker, The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolution (N.Y.: Octagon Books, 1965).
- 86 See below, pp. 142-43.
- 87 Des circonstances, pp. 94-95.
- 88 Ibid., p. 92.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 203.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Considérations, I, p. 7.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 14.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 8.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁰⁰Comte de Boulainvilliers, Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France (1727).

¹⁰¹Montesquieu, De l'esprit des lois (Paris: Garnier, 1972), XXX, 10.

¹⁰²Emmanuel Sieyès, Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État? in Paul Beik, ed., The French Revolution (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 19.

¹⁰³Considérations, I, pp. 73-74.

CHAPTER IV:

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Both as a political sociologist and comparative political analyst, Mme. de Staël ranks among Montesquieu's worthiest descendents. We have already seen how a broad sociological perspective informed her theory of progress, as well as nourished an incompatible strand of historical relativism. The present chapter will attempt to explore more fully Mme. de Staël's uses of comparison and her sociological mode of inquiry. Because Mme. de Staël was indebted to Montesquieu both for her analytical framework and, with certain modifications, for her political values, I shall turn first to examine the nature of his legacy. Like Montesquieu, she was intrigued by the sheer diversity of cultures that she encountered; yet in spite of this intrinsic fascination, her analyses were always connected to specific partisan purposes. This investigation of Mme. de Staël's comparative sociology will, accordingly, be structured by her political intentions. From this standpoint, I shall first study the idealized model of the French republic offered in Des circonstances actuelles and De la littérature, and the model of the English monarchy presented in the Considérations. Both represent Mme. de Staël's vision of the good society, although each was con-

structed in response to a different set of political circumstances. Along with these models, I shall examine the model of despotism formulated in the Considerations. Intended to portray a system of total domination, it further illuminates, by means of negative contrast, Mme. de Staël's concept of a free society. Taken together, these positive and negative models offer perhaps the most complete statement of French "liberalism" since Montesquieu, and hence are of crucial importance to any historical consideration of the liberal tradition. I shall next turn my attention to the models of Italy, Germany and Russia set out, respectively, in De l'Allemagne, Corinne and Dix années d'exil. These models occupy an ambivalent status in Mme. de Staël's oeuvre: they neither embody her preferred forms of society nor do they receive her blanket censure. Indeed, they offer examples of various national traits which, during the course of the Revolution, Mme. de Staël deemed essential to the triumph of her cherished values. Thus she lauded the "enthusiasm" of the Germans and the military spirit of the Russians at a period when the overthrow of Napoleon was uppermost in her thoughts. These models also served Mme. de Staël's practical purposes on a second level: by focusing on the manifold variety of European political cultures, she implicitly repudiated Napoleonic designs for French hegemony. Ultimately, however, such concessions to relativist standards are superseded by her commitment to the universal validity of "liberalism." From this view, Mme. de Staël's

comparative investigations of Germany, Italy and Russia function in a manner analogous to her concept of despotism; namely, they counterpoint her model of a free society.

MME. DE STAEL'S ADAPTION OF MONTESQUIEU:

Although the Lettres sur J.J. Rousseau ranks as the most significant work to emerge from Mme. de Staël's early period, it was preceded by several years by an annotation of De l'esprit des lois. This adolescent sympathy for Montesquieu, encouraged by Necker's own high estimation of the theorist, evolved in her more mature writings as an intellectual debt of formidable dimensions. Montesquieu's influence on Mme. de Staël may be detected in two distinct areas of her theorizing: the first, and most clearly visible, relates to her analytical tools; the second, to her political values. Montesquieu's methodological legacy will be detailed immediately below. As for the shared political norms of the two theorists, some preliminary remarks are in order. Both thinkers valued liberty above all other political goods, and set out to define the character of a political society that was both modern and free. For Montesquieu, these qualities were distinctive to monarchical regimes, which he held England and France (as seen through the optic of the thèse nobiliaire) to exemplify. Separated from her master by crucial historical circumstances, Mme. de Staël argued that Montesquieu's conceptualization of the monarchy was inappropriate to post-Revolutionary perspectives. Although liberty was still to be regarded as a prime value, it

could no longer be set in opposition to equality (as in Montesquieu's theory of monarchy) and no longer was its principal safeguard the elaborate artifice of ascriptive rank. Indeed with the political emergence of the middle class, liberty became closely allied with the idea of "privacy," a concept largely unanticipated by Montesquieu. While Mme. de Staël recognized much that remained of value in Montesquieu's formulations, she nonetheless insisted that his concept of a free society be recast to suit the circumstances of her own era.

In the preface to De l'esprit des lois, Montesquieu alerted his readers, "Je n'écris point pour censurer ce qui est établi dans quelque pays que ce soit." Although Montesquieu cannot be taken at his word -- and I shall later consider the nature of his partisanship -- it is nevertheless possible to examine his method apart from its political context. In his massive treatise, Montesquieu addressed himself to two central methodological problems: first, the construction of a scheme of political classification; and second, the development of a theory of physical and moral causes. The typology of governments, which occupies the first thirteen books of De l'esprit des lois, attests both to Montesquieu's cosmopolitan inquisitiveness and theoretical ingenuity. His voracious appetite for data on the diversity of human experience is here combined with a combined with a concern to uncover essential uniformities and basic concepts. Thus Montesquieu organized a multiplicity

of historically and culturally disparate political societies into three fundamental types. Each type he characterized by a distinctive "nature," which referred to the number of persons holding sovereign power, and the manner in which that power is exercised; and "principle," or passion requisite for the optimum functioning of each governmental type. Although the term was as yet uncoined, Montesquieu utilized the device of "ideal types;" the models he employed were heuristic constructs, never intended to be fully embodied in empirical reality.¹ The first political type treated by Montesquieu was the republic. Classified according to its nature, it immediately broke down into two sub-types: the democracy, in which sovereignty resided in the whole of the people; and the aristocracy, in which a part of the people was sovereign. The principle of the democracy was virtue; the principle of the aristocracy, moderation founded on virtue. Montesquieu was clearly more intrigued by the democratic model, which he restricted to classical experience,² than by the aristocratic, which he based on contemporary republics like Venice. Virtue, the animating passion of the republic, was a purely political ideal. It connoted love of law, civic devotion, patriotic enthusiasm, the conquest of private interests; in short, the ideal of perfect citizenship -- the individual absorbed completely by his social role.³

Political virtue did not spring directly from man's nature. It was, instead, a culturally created passion, the

product of a particular combination of physical, economic, and social causes. Although Montesquieu's theory of causes was not elaborated until Book XIX of De l'esprit des lois -- written long after the typology of governments which opens the work -- it is nonetheless essential to the understanding of that typology, and relates specifically to the concept of principle. In Book XIX, however, Montesquieu's concern was no longer to reduce a multiplicity of socio-political structures to three basic categories, but rather to account for this diversity of human collectivities and render it intelligible. According to Montesquieu, the unique character of any national society could be explained by reference to a particular constellation of physical and moral causes. By physical causes, Montesquieu meant such factors as climate, geographical expanse, and the barrenness or the fertility of the terrain. While he was clearly intrigued by the possibility of correlating physical causes and mental dispositions, Montesquieu was not a climatic determinist. He acknowledged that the effects of climate could be stemmed by proper legislation and that, as civilization grew in complexity, the influence of physical causes would be lessened. A greater impact was produced by moral causes, all of which Montesquieu held to be empirically discernible. They included laws, religion, economy, customs, mores, and education. These causes were regarded by Montesquieu to be interdependent and irreducible, although within a given context a particular cause (or causes) could assume an exaggerated role. The "general spirit," or characteristic

quality of a given socio-political order is the product of the totality of these causes. It is, as Aron contends, closely related to Montesquieu's earlier notion of principle.

The two synthetic ideas are related, because a regime endures only as long as the necessary sentiment (passion) exists in the people. The general spirit of a nation is that which best contributes to sustaining this sentiment or principle which is indispensable to the continuation of the regime.⁴

Returning, then, to Montesquieu's concept of the republic, we are now in a better position to understand the manner in which its distinctive principle, political virtue, is generated by a specific combination of physical and moral causes. First, the cultivation of a civic ethos required that the republic be of a small size; for only a territory of intimate dimensions, in which all citizens may come to know each other, could support a feeling of social unity and public purpose. Second, the economic arrangements of the republic must be structured to promote frugality and equality; it is essential that landholdings be small, that paternal estates be broken up, and that doweries be moderate.⁵ In a republic, it is inappropriate that wealth serve as a basis of individual distinction, or that its pursuit distract from the shared purposes of the community. The spirit of commerce, Montesquieu argued, cultivated those dispositions conducive to civic virtue.

C'est que l'esprit de commerce entraîne avec soi, celui de frugalité, d'économie, de modération, de travail, de sagesse, de tranquillité, d'ordre et de règle.⁶

Of the social requisites of republican virtue, it was education that Montesquieu considered to be of prime importance. The term carried a broad meaning: it referred to the lessons of parental example, formal schooling, and civic life. For Montesquieu, the distinctive feature of republican education was its homogeneity. In modern society, he argued, the various spheres of education are set in mutual contradiction, whereas in ancient republics all three were compatible and mutually re-enforcing.⁷ The transformation of self-love into self-renunciation, the essence of republican virtue, required a coordinated and continuous effort:

C'est dans le gouvernement républicain que l'on a besoin de tout la puissance de l'éducation. La crainte des gouvernements despotiques naît d'elle-même parmi les menaces...; l'honneur des monarchies est favorisé par les passions, et les favorise à son tour; mais la vertu politique est un renoncement à soi-même, qui est toujours une chose très pénible.⁸

The deeds of the ancient republicans, nourished by a homogenous political education, are thus "astonishing" to modern man, a product of fragmented loyalties. (This emerges as a central theme in Mme. de Staël's writings.)

La plupart des peuples anciens vivaient dans des gouvernements qui ont la vertu pour principe: et, lorsqu'elle y était dans sa force, on y faisait des choses que nous ne voyons plus aujourd'hui et qui étonnent nos petites âmes.⁹

While a spirit of equality is proper to social relations in a republic, it ought not to efface all distinctions of authority.¹⁰ Laws being simple, civic norms must be internalized and a rigid moral code upheld.¹¹

Despite Montesquieu's celebrated assertion in Book XI that England was unique among nations in setting political liberty as its goal,¹² he clearly regarded liberty to be a property of all uncorrupted monarchies and republics, "la liberté politique concerne les monarchies modérées comme républiques .."¹³ In fact, his characterization of England must be somewhat qualified by an earlier passage which attributes the same goal of political liberty to Sparta (in Book XI, Montesquieu shifted his position and attributed to Sparta the aim of war), "Le seul but de Lacédémone, était la liberté..."¹⁴ Thus political liberty emerges as a fundamental value for both the ancients and the moderns (regardless of the confusion over its specific teleological status); what remains distinct is the context of its realization. Yet before turning to elaborate the conditions of liberty relevant to ancient republics, it is necessary to examine the meaning of the term itself.

Despite its central importance to his theory, Montesquieu was unable to arrive at any clear definition of political liberty. Three separate explanations of the term are offered in Book XI. First, it is identified with security from fear or peace of mind.

La liberté politique dans in citoyen est cette tranquillité d'esprit qui provient de l'opinion que chacun a de sa sûreté...

It is this conception of liberty which negatively illuminates his treatment of despotism. A second definition appears to carry Rousseauian implications,

...la liberté ne peut consister qu'à pouvoir faire ce que l'on doit vouloir, et à n'être point contraint de faire ce que l'on ne doit pas vouloir...

Yet, as Neumann¹⁵ and Plamenatz¹⁶ argue, an interpretation which equates freedom with authority is incompatible with Montesquieu's general position. Thus Plamenatz suggests that Montesquieu regarded this definition to be equivalent to a third which followed it closely, "La liberté est le droit de faire tout ce que les lois permettent.." According to this statement, a subject's liberty is that area within which he is unrestrained by law. Neumann, too, suggests that this was the essential point of Montesquieu's discussion. It is important to make clear, however, that Montesquieu did not stress the hostility of liberty and law; to the contrary, he regarded law as a prior condition of liberty:

Un peuple libre n'est pas celui qui a une telle ou une telle forme de gouvernement; c'est celui qui jouit de la forme de gouvernement établi par la loi.

His position is not dissimilar to Locke's;¹⁷ both theorists maintained that through the constraint of arbitrary power by law, freedom is enlarged and given substance. Unlike Locke, however, Montesquieu recognized the existence of other forms of restraint -- religion, customs, manners; though in the absence of law, he considered them to be insufficient and precarious.

Although Montesquieu insisted on the compatibility of liberty and law, he remained sensitive to the fact that the law could itself be an instrument of oppression. Hence, he concentrated his attentions on the character of the law and,

more especially, on the nature of the political system of which the law was a product. Concerning the character of the law, Montesquieu insisted that its scope be appropriately restricted:

Nous avons dit que les lois étaient des institutions particulières et précises du législateur; et les mœurs et les manières, des institutions de la nation en général. De là il suit que lorsqu'on veut changer les mœurs et les manières, il ne faut pas les changer par les lois; cela paraîtrait trop tyrannique; il vaut mieux les changer par d'autres mœurs et d'autres manières. 18

As to the structural conditions of political liberty, Montesquieu argued that it can only be maintained by a "moderate" government in which political power is carefully diffused. Because he believed that men were by nature intemperate, Montesquieu remained convinced that a system of internal checks within the government, which would prevent the concentration of political power in any single source, was crucial to the safeguarding of liberty. Montesquieu continually emphasized the intricate design of a free government; its system of multiple checks depended upon both a juridical division of powers and the constitutional representation of contending social forces. Montesquieu not only recognized the legitimacy of social conflict, but considered it, within a framework of law, to be the very foundation of political liberty. For liberty to be effectively realized, he argued, each major social group must be in a position to defend its interests.

It is this conflictual theory of liberty that Montesquieu adapted to, or more accurately, imposed on his conception of the ancient republic. The theme that liberty is

borne of social dissensions was already present in Book II of De l'esprit des lois ("Le malheur d'une république, c'est lorsqu'il n'y a plus de brigues ..."), although, still under the influence of Aristotle, Montesquieu made no reference to a juridical separation of powers. The theme is again taken up in the Considérations, where Montesquieu offered as evidence of Roman liberty the constitutional recognition of class conflict under the Republic.¹⁹ In Book XI of De l'esprit des lois, however, Montesquieu made a half-hearted attempt to combine the theory of mixed government, which he had hitherto emphasized, with the doctrine of the separation of powers. His treatment of the Roman Republic followed directly upon his celebrated analysis of the English constitution in which he first expounded the separation of powers doctrine. The doctrine, which calls for the strict separation of political authority into its three constituent functions,²⁰ is clearly reflected in the structure of his discussion of the Roman constitution. Thus he entitled chapter XVI, "De la puissance législative dans la République Romaine;" chapter XVII, "De la puissance exécutive dans la même République;" and chapter XVIII, "De la puissance de juger dans le gouvernement de Rome." (Montesquieu never sought to examine the possibility that these functions might have held different meanings for the ancients and the moderns.) Yet Montesquieu ultimately retreated from the conclusion suggested by his categories of analysis, i.e. that Roman liberty stemmed from the separation of the func-

tionally divided branches of government, and again advanced a theory rooted in the older doctrine of mixed government. It was, Montesquieu argued, the balance struck by the plebs and the patricians jointly sharing all functions of government upon which Roman liberty was founded:

A Rome, le peuple ayant la plus grande partie de la puissance législative, une partie de la puissance exécutive, et une partie de la puissance de juger, c'était un grand pouvoir qu'il fallait balancer par un autre. Le sénat avait bien une partie de la puissance exécutive; il avait quelque branche de la puissance législative, mais cela ne suffisait pas pour contre-balancer le peuple. Il fallait qu'il eût part à la puissance de juger ...²¹

However, there exists a real tension between Montesquieu's ideal of self-renunciation, the essence of republican virtue, and his liberalism, which relied on the presence of competitive group interests. Montesquieu, in effect, juxtaposed two quite distinct notions of the common good: the first, resting on the assumption that private, partial or group interests are illegitimate, professes the existence of an objective transcendent public good; the second, acknowledging the legitimacy of diverse interests, defined the public good as the most inclusive satisfaction of these subjective wants. This was precisely Rousseau's point when he distinguished between the "general will" and the "will of all," each of which was informed by a distinct conception of liberty. Montesquieu appears not to have perceived the tension. By offering separate definitions of "ancient" and "modern" liberty, Mme. de Staël ostensibly avoided this difficulty. Nevertheless a careful examination of her

writings will, on a deeper level, reveal a similar conflict of loyalties between the civic ideal of the polis and the self-regarding claims of the individual.

Montesquieu had assumed that, as a form of government, the republic was primarily of antiquarian interest;²² it was the monarchy which he held to be that form of free society most appropriate to European states of his own day. With his discussion of the monarchy, Montesquieu entered the active realm of French politics. For if, on one hand, his monarchical model was intended as a heuristic classificatory construct; on another, it was deployed as a political weapon with which to uphold the claims of the aristocracy against the defenders of centralized royal power. Indeed the origins of Montesquieu's monarchical model are to be found in that tradition of thought associated with proponents of the thèse nobiliare. I have, in the previous chapter, discussed the nature and background of this tradition; it was Montesquieu's great accomplishment to have synthesized the various strands of argument -- Huguenot, feudal, magistral -- which nourished it,²³ and to have raised the level of historical scholarship submitted in its defense.²⁴ Thus the monarchical model, ostensibly an objective general category of comparative analysis, embodied Montesquieu's cherished norms and was the product of a distinctly partisan way of theorizing about the French constitution.

Describing the "nature" of the monarchy, Montesquieu wrote:

Les pouvoirs intermédiaires, subordonnés et dépendants, constituent la nature du gouvernement monarchique, c'est-à-dire de celui où un seul gouverne par les lois fondamentales. ²⁵

While Montesquieu shed little light on the explicit content of these fundamental laws, it is clear that he interpreted them to legitimate the presence of "les pouvoirs intermédiaires." These included, in addition to a nobility with hereditary privileges and parlements with political functions as elaborated above, a clergy with fixed rights and municipalities with acknowledged privileges. By asserting that the status of these intermediary bodies was recognized by the fundamental law, Montesquieu drew upon the arguments of his constitutionalist forebearers to dispute the absolutist claims set out by proponents of the thèse royale. Familiar with the Mandevillian paradox that egoistic calculation forms the basis of socially useful activity and the Machiavellian theory of "salutary frictions,"²⁶ Montesquieu depicted the monarchical system as actuated by the aggressive self-interest of its various social ranks. This thesis he developed in his conception of "honor," the distinctive principle of the monarchy. Defined as "le préjugé de chaque personne et de chaque condition,"²⁷ honor "fait mouvoir toutes les parties du corps politique; il les lie par son action même et il se trouve que chacun va au bien commun, croyant aller à ses intérêts particuliers."²⁸ As compared with the self-sacrificing virtue of the ancient republic, the principle of the monarchy was "un honneur faux:" it was animated by the less exalted springs of man's nature;³⁰

it valued pleasing appearances above genuine worth; it sanctioned deception and goaded ambitions.³¹ Considerations such as these often impelled Montesquieu to adopt an ironic tone when describing the mechanics of honor and especially when reviling its excesses; his final assessment of the principle, however, was decidedly positive.³² First, the competition for esteem and distinction inspired by honor secured for the monarchy a number of social benefits including military grandeur, economic prosperity and a flourishing culture.³³ Second, Montesquieu regarded honor as an attitude of mind appropriate to the maintenance of political liberty. The mutual diffidence, exclusive loyalties,³⁴ and contending ambitions of the various social groups animated by that principle militated against the concentration of political power in any single source. As a result, the exercise of power in the monarchical system never passed unchallenged; only through a process of accommodation and compromise could obedience be secured.³⁵ As a barrier against the encroachment of arbitrary power, then, the sentiment of honor supplemented and buttressed the formal structure of the law:

... que les choses que l'honneur défend sont plus rigoureusement défendues, lorsque les lois ne concourent point à les proscrire; et que celles qu'il exige sont plus fortement exigées, lorsque les lois ne les demandent pas.³⁶

Montesquieu spoke in detail of the physical and moral causes which create and sustain the sentiment of honor in the monarchy. With regard to its physical requis-

ites, Montesquieu stressed the importance of moderate territorial dimensions.³⁷ Prominent among the moral causes supportive of the monarchy were a complex social structure and an intricate network of law. Social relations, according to Montesquieu, were marked by inequalities arising from the differentiation of ranks;³⁸ a hierarchy of privileges,³⁹ and a discriminating system of etiquette.⁴⁰ Relations between the sexes exhibited a spirit of liberty,⁴¹ "Les femmes ont peu de retenue dans les monarchies ..."⁴² This complex stratification of monarchical society was mirrored by a system of legal restraints of comparable intricacy:

Il ne faut donc pas être étonné de trouver dans les lois de ces États tant de règles, de restrictions, d'extensions, qui multiplient les cas particuliers, et semblent faire un art de la raison même.⁴³

Finally, an economy founded on luxury⁴⁵ sustained the egalitarian conditions essential to the monarchy and contributed to the well-being of all ranks of society:

Comme, par la constitution des monarchies, les richesses y sont inégalement partagées, il faut bien qu'il ait du luxe. Si les riches n'y dépensent pas beaucoup, les pauvres mourront de faim ... le luxe doit aller en croissant, du laboureur à l'artisan, au négociant, aux nobles, aux grands seigneurs, aux traitants principaux, aux princes ...⁴⁷

To summarize, then, Montesquieu constructed the republic and the monarchy as contrasting political types: in the former, social forces trained the ancients to sacrifice their individual interests to the collectivity; in modern society, these forces promoted individualism and group self-seeking. As we shall see, Montesquieu's model of England

falls under the second category (in the English model, however, ego-centered behavior does not give rise to a structure of social artifice). In both cases, Montesquieu sought to demonstrate how, given the demise of ancient virtue, a common good was realizable within the context of contemporary society. Following Mandeville's lead, he focused on the paradox that actions inspired by self-interest had beneficial results for society as a whole. From this view, it was unnecessary that men be actuated by the common good, so long as the consequences of their behavior indirectly served it. Hence liberty thrived on jealous conflicts; the taste for luxury supported a flourishing economy; and a vain attention to court etiquette instilled the discipline of social order. If Montesquieu expressed admiration for the classical republican citizen, his theoretical concern focused on the problem of transforming and adapting ancient civic values to the conditions of modernity. This enterprise broadly anticipated Mme. de Stael's own, more complex, efforts. Lastly, while Montesquieu never consciously adhered to a theory of historical progress, it is striking to observe that his formulation contained many of the key elements of Mme. de Stael's progressionist political sociology.

To justify and further illuminate his monarchical model by means of contrast, Montesquieu offered a third political construct—despotism. As political types, monarchy and despotism were antithetical: the one depicted a free and moderate political system, while the other characterized a system of total domination. Although Montesquieu's

formulation of the concept of despotism was unprecedented in its sophistication, it cannot stand apart from the tradition of theorizing which anticipated it. Montesquieu's most immediate sources were the tracts composed by aristocratic and Huguenot opponents of Louis XIV.⁴⁸ By identifying despotism as a distinctively Oriental mode of government, both groups made use of the concept to denounce the arbitrary exercise of power by the King and the centralization of royal authority as incompatible with the French constitution. Montesquieu, pursuing an analogous set of political purposes, took over the concept of Oriental despotism and elaborated upon the relativist arguments of his predecessors. His principal indictment of despotism, however, derived not from the dictates of relativism but rather from a universal standard of justice.⁴⁹ Despotic government, he argued, violated Natural Law: "corrompu par sa nature," it contained the germs of its own destruction.

According to Montesquieu, despotism was that form of government in which, "un seul, sans règle, entraîne tout par sa volonté et par ses caprices".⁵¹ In contrast to the republic and the monarchy, the despotism was, by definition, immoderate; only religion and custom functioned as restraints on despotic power.⁵² Absent from the despotism were the "salutary conflicts" which, for Montesquieu, constituted evidence of a free society; its supportive passion being "fear," despotism could accommodate only the most servile forms of obedience.⁵³ An egalitarian and atomized social structure replaced the hierarchical rank order of the

monarchy and the communal values of the republic. Despotic equality connoted equality in servitude -- the uniform subjugation of an aggregate of isolated and impotent individuals by the despot. The simplicity characteristic of the despotism was equally manifest in the cultural and economic realms. As intellectual enlightenment would arouse opposition to despotic rule, it was requisite that subjects be kept in a state of ignorance:

Tout y doit rouler sur deux ou trois idées; il n'en faut donc pas de nouvelles. Quand vous instruisez une bête, vous vous donnez bien de garde de lui faire changer de maître, de leçon, et d'allure; vous frappez son cerveau par deux ou trois mouvements, et pas davantage...⁵⁴

In the economic sphere, there existed no fixed structure of property rights; all property relations were subject to the arbitrary discretion of the despot:

Il suit de ce que les terres appartiennent au prince, qu'il n'y a presque point de lois civiles sur la propriété des terres. Il suit du droit que le souverain a de succéder, qu'il n'y en a pas non plus sur les successions. Le négoce exclusif qu'il fait dans quelques pays, rend inutiles toutes de lois sur le commerce.⁵⁵

This resulting insecurity produced a condition of unrelieved economic distress.⁵⁶ As a negative political model, the despotism thus stood condemned both by the transcendent standards of Natural Law and my immanent systemic contradictions.

Despite Montesquieu's implication that the constitutions of France and England were linked by common Frankish origins,⁵⁷ it is implausible that, given his acute appreciation of the uniqueness of national circumstances, he ever

intended the English system to be replicated in France.⁵⁸ However a number of his later disciples, among them Jacques Necker and his daughter, took full advantage of this historical loophole to translate Montesquieu's admiration of the English model into a demand for its literal adoption by the French. The attractiveness of the English constitution to thinkers like Montesquieu and the Protestant Mme. de Staël is illuminated by the knowledge of the political origins of French Anglophilia; namely, the aristocratic and Huguenot opposition to royal absolutism. Notwithstanding laudatory accounts of the English system furnished by earlier visitors like Saint-Evremond, England did not assume significance as a political model until it became a refuge for Huguenot exiles following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Through the optic of these victims of French absolutism, England was felicitously regarded as "(le) plus sage gouvernement qui ait jamais été."⁵⁹ Its defining qualities were consistently held to be liberty, tolerance, and constitutional government -- the polar opposites of those characteristics imputed to France. Thus conceived, the English model also figured in the polemical strategy of the Huguenots' allies, the noblesse d'épée, as well as in the writings of Montesquieu's own class, the noblesse de robe. The publist Jean Le Laboureur, for example, concluded his treatise in defense of the political claims of the French aristocracy, Histoire de la Pairie de France et du Parlement de Paris, with a tendentious study of the English House of Lords. Although by Montesquieu's time, Anglophilia was

no longer confined exclusively to proponents of the thèse nobiliare (as evidenced by Voltaire's seminal panegyric, the Lettres philosophiques),⁶⁰ it remained for the French nobility's greatest theoretician to produce the period's most sophisticated and influential analysis of the English constitution.

As depicted in Books XI and XIX of the De l'Esprit des lois, England could not neatly be accommodated by Montesquieu's earlier⁶¹ analytical framework. His various attempts to classify it as a "mixed"⁶² or "moderate"⁶³ monarchy were incompatible with his observation that England lacked the two essential ingredients of the monarchical model, namely, intermediary bodies⁶⁴ and a highly refined sense of honor.⁶⁵ Nor could England properly be classified as "une nation ou la république se cache sous la forme de la monarchie"⁶⁶ given its acknowledged absence of virtue, the animating passion of the republic. Thus it is possible to conclude that, unlike the previous governmental types he formulated, England was a model sui generis.⁶⁷ According to Montesquieu, England's uniqueness consisted of liberty as a national goal; for whereas most forms of moderate government incorporated liberty to some degree, only England promoted it as the supreme political good.⁶⁸ In Book XI, Montesquieu analyzed the constitutional mechanisms which secured English liberty; in Book XIX, he examined the physical and moral causes which combined to maintain it.

Montesquieu's characterization of the English con-

stitution, which drew upon the well-worn theory of mixed government and the newly emergent doctrine of the separation of powers, once again revealed the synthetic quality of his intelligence. For his notion of the separation of powers Montesquieu was indebted to the polemical writings of Bolingbroke, the English theorist whose social perspectives and political orientations he shared.⁶⁹ The doctrine, which called for a three-fold division and separation of governmental functions, well accorded with Montesquieu's own preferences for a fragmented structure of political power. But whereas in Bolingbroke's hands, the doctrine remained only a "partisan cry,"⁷⁰ it was, in Book XI, transformed by Montesquieu into an articulate and coherent theory.⁷¹ Montesquieu was the first, according to M.J.C. Vile,⁷² to describe the three branches of government in a characteristically modern way:⁷³

... ces trois pouvoirs; celui de faire les lois, celui d'exécuter les résolutions publiques, et celui de juger les crimes ou les différends des particuliers ...⁷⁴

And, with a clarity which eluded his predecessors,⁷⁵ Montesquieu proposed that the strict separation of these functionally distinct branches of government was a necessary precondition of political liberty:

Lorsque dans la même personne ou dans le même corps de magistrature, la puissance législative est réunie à la puissance exécutive, il n'y a point de liberté; ... Il n'y a point encore de liberté si la puissance de juger n'est pas séparée de la puissance législative et de l'exécutrice ...⁷⁶

Upon this framework, Montesquieu elaborated a system of posi-

tive checks between the executive and the legislature,⁷⁷ and within the legislative branch itself.⁷⁸ Lastly, he combined with these juridical notions a sociological theory of liberty deriving from the traditional concept of mixed government. As interpreted in the England of Montesquieu's day, the idea of mixed government connoted the joint sharing of legislative power by the monarch, the nobility, and the people. Although Montesquieu refused to regard the monarch as part of the legislative branch, he nonetheless deemed it essential for each social class to be in a constitutional position to defend its interests. While ascribing no determinant social status to the judiciary,⁷⁹ Montesquieu envisaged a balance of social forces within a two-chambered legislature, with an upper chamber controlled by the nobility and a lower chamber representing the people. A faith in the fundamental harmony of nature prevented Montesquieu from conceiving of the possibility of political deadlock:

Ces trois puissances devraient former un repos ou une inaction. Mais comme, par le mouvement nécessaire des choses, elles sont contraintes d'aller, elles seront forcées d'aller de concert.⁸⁰

It was not until chapter XIX that Montesquieu completed his portrait of England with an examination of the physical and moral circumstances that animated its intricate constitutional machinery. While a good deal of Montesquieu's account simply reflected the conventional image of England held by Anglophiles of his day, he can be credited as having, within the short space of several pages, shaped

that image into intellectually manageable proportions easily transmittable to such later disciples as Jacques Necker and his daughter. The independence of spirit which, according to Montesquieu, characterized the English and accounted for their high valuation of political liberty, was the product of a variety of causes. Although his diagnosis ascribed a subordinate role to the influence of physical causes,⁸¹ Montesquieu remained attentive to such determinants as England's insular position,⁸² fertile but non-autarkic terrain,⁸³ and distinctive climate.⁸⁴

For Montesquieu, moral causes had contributed more directly to the formation of the English character, and prominent among these were economic activity and social structure. He described England as a commercial nation, with a manufacturing and trading economy founded on "des besoins réels" rather than "le raffinement de la vanité."⁸⁵ This commercial spirit, which engendered a concern for individual well-being and the maintenance of prosperity, was incompatible with the interests of the military;⁸⁶ hence the disposition of the nation was pacific. In consequence, "Si cette nation envoyait au loin des colonies, elle le ferait plus pour étendre son commerce que sa domination."⁸⁷ Lastly, because public credit financed the operations of the state, its citizens were continually alert to the conduct of government.⁸⁸

In Book XI, Montesquieu alluded to the aristocratic character of English society as reflected in the constitu-

tional architecture of the state; in Book XIX, he turned to examine the foundations of class stratification. The criterion he singled out as the basis of social distinction was merit: privileges of social status were accorded in proportion to one's contribution to the spiritual and material enrichment of the nation. The English aristocracy comprised the natural elite of society, those whose superior capacities -- evidenced by their talents and their wealth -- entitled them to rule. Thus social divisions, while pronounced, were not rigid. By comparison, Montesquieu viewed the French nobility as a source of social waste and political servility. His equivocal attitude toward his native brethren had, in light of this idealized portrait of the English aristocracy, had taken a decidedly negative turn:

Les dignités, faisoient partie de la constitution fondamentale, seroient plus fixes qu'ailleurs; mais, d'un autre côté, les grands ... s'approcheroient plus du peuple; les rangs seroient donc plus séparés, et les personnes plus confondues ... On n'y estime guère les hommes par les talents ou des attributs frivoles, mais par des qualités réelles; et de ce genre il n'y a que deux: les richesses et le mérite personnel.⁸⁹

Montesquieu's description of the customs and character of the English merely restated the commonplace: their manners were without affectation; their dispositions, melancholic; their women, timid and retiring.⁹⁰

Montesquieu's views on what today we would term the "political sociology" of England were complex. There was much that he admired about the English system: he spoke of the high salience of political matters, the toleration of diverse viewpoints, the function of public opinion as a

safeguard of English liberties, and the deep patriotism of the English nation. He looked upon its representative government as providing maximum opportunity for political involvement,⁹¹ yet escaping the dangers of mob rule.⁹² His analysis of English party politics brilliantly illustrates a mastery of the Mandevillian paradox: what appeared to be the evils of the English party system -- its factious dissensions and jealously shifting party loyalties -- in fact served socially useful ends by maintaining political liberty and ensuring the continued vitality of English public life.⁹³

The two remaining moral causes to be examined by Montesquieu were religion and literary culture. He remarked upon the spirit of religious toleration, as evidenced by the many sects that flourished along side the established faith, and upon the simplicity and restraint of the English of the English clergy. As for England's literary culture, Montesquieu advanced a sociological theory of literature which, though skeletal, anticipated Mme. de Staël's most celebrated work:

Le caractère de la nation paraîtrait surtout dans les ouvrages d'esprit, dans lesquels on verrait des recueilles ... Leurs écrits satiriques seraient sanglants ... Leurs poètes auraient plus souvent cette rudesse originale de l'invention, qu'une certaine délicatesse qui donne le goût ...⁹⁴

Of the two modern political types depicted by Montesquieu, his model of England most directly informed Mme. de Staël's own perspectives. Whereas she explicitly rejected many of the features of the monarchical model as unsuited to post-Revolutionary France, his analysis of the English

constitution contained themes she would further refine and adapt. Among the themes to re-emerge in Mme. de Staël's writings were Montesquieu's attentiveness to the political role of merit and esteem; his conflictual theory of liberty; and, most significantly, his refusal to regard the public life of the citizen and the private pursuits of modern man as mutually exclusive ideals.

At the opening of this chapter, Mme. de Staël's twofold debt to Montesquieu was described. His first legacy was methodological. Montesquieu's theory of physical and moral causes provided the structural framework of De l'Allemagne, as well as of her investigations of other national societies:

Les réflexions que le pays et les livres m'ont suggérées sont partagées en quatre sections ... Le première traitera de l'Allemagne et des moeurs des Allemands; la second, de la littérature et des arts; la troisième, de la philosophie et de la morale; la quatrième, de la religion et de l'enthousiasme. 95

She more carefully treated moral determinants that Montesquieu had merely touched on -- literature and woman's social status -- and transformed his concept of "general spirit" into "national character." Like Montesquieu, Mme. de Staël refused to attribute to any one cause a decisive role in shaping a nation's character; nonetheless she often ventured to assign priorities:

... les religions et les lois decident presque entièrement de la ressemblance ou de la différence de l'esprit des nations. Le climate peut encore y apporter quelques changemens ... 96

If Montesquieu's perspective was global, Mme. de Staël confined her attention to the nations of Europe, offering vivid portraits of France, England, Germany, Italy and Russia. She turned to comparison for reasons both intellectual and partisan, both to explain and to exhort: thus English constitutionalism was not only illuminated by contrast to the arbitrary government of Napoleonic France, but also endorsed. In a less consistent manner, Mme. de Staël also made use of Montesquieu's scheme of political classification. Like him, she spoke of honor as the actuating principle of the (pre-revolutionary) monarchy; fear as the passion distinctive to despotism (though she largely re-worked its meaning);⁹⁷ and, as seen in the preceding chapter, civic virtue as the spring of the republic. As for representative government, the political type she regarded most appropriate to her own day, its distinguishing passion was the "spirit of liberty," incorporating the motives of natural sympathy and self-seeking individualism.

Thus we come to Montesquieu's second legacy to Mme. de Staël: the valuation of liberty as a prime political good. Not only did Mme. de Staël espouse her master's preferred value, she also accepted much of what he had to say about the requirements of a free political system: its recognition of ordered group conflicts, its constitutional limitations on the exercise of power, its decentralization of political decision-making. What Mme. de Staël could not accept, however, was the adequacy of monarchical model

to her own historical circumstances. It was, she conceded, a framework properly fitted to the Old Regime, though her assessment of honor recalls Montesquieu's irony more than his approval:

La délicatesse du point d'honneur, l'un des prestiges de l'ordre privilégié, obligeoit les nobles à décorer la soumission la plus dévouée des formes de la liberté. Il falloit qu'ils conservassent, dans leurs rapports avec leur maître une sorte d'esprit de chevalerie ... afin de se donner l'air de choisir le joug qu'ils portoient; et mêlant ainsi l'honneur avec la servitude, ils s'essayoient de se courber sans s'avilir.⁹⁸

The Revolution had, to Mme. de Staël's mind, brought about changes in France which challenged the literal applicability of Montesquieu's model. Of these changes, perhaps the most fundamental was the shift from artifice to nature as a standard of legitimacy. If, prior to the Revolution, the nobility had preserved the form of liberty by means of artifice, the substance of liberty would now be secured by a political system rooted in man's nature:

Sous la monarchie, une foule d'usages substituoient quelquefois le ton de la convenance à celui de la raison, les égards de la société aux sentimens du coeur ... mais la parure de la vérité dans un pays libre, est d'accord avec la vérité même. L'expression et le sentiment doivent dériver de la même source.⁹⁹

This shift, it should be noted, entailed a major readjustment in Mme. de Staël's angle of vision: she no longer discussed human nature in exclusively sociological terms, as in her national character studies, but now referred to an "essentialist" definition of man, realizable through a distinctive socio-political structure of universal applicability. This perspective provided the basis of a thorough-

going reassessment of Montesquieu's views on the ordering principles of political society. With certain modifications in its formulation, liberty was retained as Mme. de Staël's central political value. She argued, however, that liberty could no longer be based on the inequalities of social convention as depicted in Montesquieu's monarchical model, but rather must be combined with that form of equality dictated by man's nature. The reconciliation of these values was, in turn, to be achieved through a representative form of government based on indirect popular participation and public opinion. Because these concepts -- liberty, equality and representative government -- are fundamental to both the republican and monarchical models constructed by Mme. de Staël, I shall consider the meaning of each before proceeding further.

Liberty:

We have, in the previous chapter, already encountered Mme. de Staël's definition of liberty; the modern meaning of the term, it will be recalled, was essentially negative in emphasis: "c'est tout ce qui garantit l'indépendance des citoyens contre le pouvoir du gouvernement." It will also be recalled that Montesquieu's understanding of the term was not dissimilar, "La liberté est le droit de faire tout ce que les lois permettent ...". For both thinkers, then, liberty referred to that area within which the citizens was unrestrained by law. Neither theorist, however, equated liberty with license (both pointed out the presence of non-legal restraints

on men's actions) and neither went the route of Godwin by interpreting liberty as the absence of law. Indeed Mme. de Staël also shared Montesquieu's concept of liberty as security from fear which, in political terms, translated as the condition of assured expectations provided by constitutional government. As law was recognized as a necessary condition of liberty, the fundamental question for both theorists was not the presence or absence of legal restraint, but rather the range and method of law-making appropriate to a "liberal" or "moderate" government.

Although Mme. de Staël offered no concise statement defining the legitimate boundaries of political interference, it may be inferred from her writings that she envisaged a line of demarcation similar to the one proposed by Constant:

Les citoyens possèdent des droits individuels indépendants de toute autorité sociale et politique, et toute autorité qui viole ces droits devient illégitime. Les droits des citoyens sont la liberté individuelle, la liberté religieuse, la liberté d'opinion, dans laquelle est comprise sa publicité, la jouissance de la propriété, la garantie contre tout arbitraire.¹⁰⁰

More often than Constant, however, Mme. de Staël appeared willing to compromise the liberties in the face of what she considered to be overriding circumstances; thus she advocated restrictions on the freedom of the press and assembly under the Directory as a means of quelling extremist threats to the Republic.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless it is clear that she intended such measures to be temporary,¹⁰² allowing Constant's formulation to stand as the cornerstone of her own

political theory.

Having noted that Mme. de Staël posited "human nature" as the basis for political values in the post-Revolutionary era, it is appropriate to consider her justification of liberty from this perspective. Recall that both liberty and human nature were historically bound concepts: liberty, as defined above, was a distinctively modern value; human nature, too, was tied to modernity since self-interest and sympathy were revealed as essential springs of man's behavior only at an advanced stage of historical progress. In the modern era these facets of man's nature manifested themselves in a variety of spontaneous relationships, ranging from those rooted primarily in sympathy and its related sentiments -- marriage, the family, friendship, charitable and religious ties -- to those rooted in passive self-interest -- commercial enterprise, property ownership, etc. These spheres of endeavor were regarded by Mme. de Staël as outlets for man's natural inclinations. To the extent that they were encroached upon by the state (other than for the necessary preservation of order), man's opportunities for felicity were diminished.

The concept of privacy enlisted by Mme. de Staël figured only obliquely in Montesquieu's treatment of English liberty. The demand for privacy was closely tied to the ascendancy of the middle class, and invoked as a rationalization of their interests. It embodied claims for a free market economy; it rested on a vision of personal relations (a high

valuation of family life, etc.) that was distinctively bourgeois. Admittedly, Mme. de Staël's discussion of the concept raised more difficulties than it resolved: Why, for example, presume a natural harmony between the motives of self-interest and sympathy? What, precisely, is the defining quality of the private, since all man's actions can be said to derive from his nature? Notwithstanding such difficulties, the concept of liberty as privacy posed a fundamental challenge to Mme. de Staël's political opponents of the Left and Right. The Jacobins warned against its indifference to the values of community and proclaimed it a principle of social disintegration.¹⁰³ The conservatives similarly condemned its defense of the individual at the expense of the community; for them, however, community suggested hierarchy, tradition and religion -- principles antithetical to the communitarian ideal of the Jacobins.

To this point, I have examined Mme. de Staël's concept of liberty as it referred to the relation of the individual to the state. She was no less intrigued by the concept as it bore on the relation of the individual to society, and specifically with regard to the "superior" or "unique" personality confronted by the suffocating pressures of social sentiment (a question unanticipated by Montesquieu). Mme. de Staël approached the issue from a distinctively feminine angle of vision: she focused on the plight of the superior woman who, to her mind, suffered the yoke of a double prejudice against both her sex and her

superiority:

La société est constituée pour l'intérêt de la majorité, c'est-à-dire des gens médiocres: lorsque des personnes extraordinaires se présentent, elle ne sait trop si elle doit en attendre du bien ou du mal; et cette inquiétude la porte nécessairement à les juger avec rigueur. Ces vérités générales s'appliquent aux femmes d'une manière bien plus forte encore: il est convenu qu'elles doivent respecter toutes les barrières, porter tous les genres de joug; et comme il y auroit de l'inconvénient pour le bonheur de la société en général à ce que le plus grand nombre des femmes eut des sentimens passionnées ou même des lumières très-étendus, il n'est pas étonnant qu'à cet égard la société redoute tout ce qui fait exception, même dans le sens le plus favorable.¹⁰⁴

Mme. de Staël thus raised the question that would later be more subtly discussed by Tocqueville and Mill. Her own treatment of the issue was, in fact, disappointingly vague, and frequently lapsed into emotional outburst, "vous (society) brisez des cœurs, vous renversez des destinées qui auroient fait l'ornement du monde."¹⁰⁵

Equality:

For Montesquieu, the ascriptive inequality of social orders constituted the essence of the monarchy, as well as the prime guarantee of its liberty. Separated from her master by the intervening Revolution, Mme. de Staël could no longer consider this formulation acceptable. She recognized equality as the triumphant principle of the Revolution: it had, accordingly, to be reconciled with liberty and accommodated by her own political perspectives:

... l'égalité politique est une vérité éternelle que la force de la Révolution française a fait triompher.¹⁰⁶ c'est pour l'établir à jamais dans l'univers qu'il faut l'unir aux principes de gouvernement que l'expérience a consacrés.¹⁰⁷

What was the meaning of equality as Mme. de Staël understood the term? It referred, first, to the concept of equality of opportunity (earlier alluded to by Montesquieu in his discussion of England) implying: a) that careers must be accessible to all irrespective of hereditary distinctions of rank; and b) that all rewards, titles, and honors be awarded on the basis of merit as determined by performance:

Toutes les distinctions héréditaires sont une inégalité factice quelquefois d'accord, mais souvent en opposition avec l'inégalité naturelle. Quand vous admettez tous les hommes à la concurrence de tous les emplois et que vous assurez la liberté de choix ... vous êtes assurés que les hommes les plus éclairés, les plus honnêtes, les plus considérés seront appelés par le peuple à le gouverner. 108

This principle of equality rested on the assumption that men were, in fact, unequal in talent, ability and intelligence; it recognized these inequalities and sanctioned them by an appeal to nature. The purity of this principle was somewhat compromised by Mme. de Staël's attempt in the Considérations to reconcile it with the existence of a hereditary nobility:

En Angleterre les rangs et l'égalité sont combinés de la manière la plus favorable à la prospérité de l'Etat ... on a fait servir le respect des ancêtres à former une classe qui donne le moyen de flatter les hommes de talent en les y associant. 109

Yet the most striking departure from the principle remained Mme. de Staël's refusal to apply it to members of her own sex: "On a raison d'exclure les femmes des affaires politiques et civiles." 110

Mme. de Staël's conception of political equality presumed property-ownership as a requisite for active citizenship. This criterion and its justification will be examined in detail in the following chapter. Because the right to acquire and hold property was open to all, Mme. de Staël maintained that the restriction of active citizenship to property-holders was fully consistent with her cardinal principle of equality of opportunity.

A third principle of equality defended by Mme. de Staël was equality before the law, as contained in her notion of la liberté civile. By this principle, she understood equal protection of the law with reference to: a) rules equally applicable to all men qua men ("Point d'arrestation, de jugement, que dans les formes légales et universelles");¹¹¹ b) rules as they recognize relevant differences among men ("Points d'impôts qui ne soient proportionnels");¹¹² and c) impartiality in the administration of the law.¹¹³

If Mme. de Staël extolled equality as "la vérité éternelle qui la force de la Révolution a fait triompher," she refused to embrace the other meanings of that term that flowed from the Revolutionary experience. With regard to the idea of economic equality, she could abide neither the Jacobin's minimal program of economic regulation nor the more radical Babeuvist demand for l'égalité réelle to be achieved through the abolition of private property. The absolute sanctity of property rights being intrinsic to her constitutionalist conception of liberty, Mme. de Staël dubbed her op-

ponents of the Left "anarchists." Like Tocqueville after her, she perceived the tension between the values of liberty and equality. As for social equality, Mme. de Staël abhorred what she regarded to be the indiscriminate social leveling inspired by the Jacobins:

On vouloit cependant établir un genre d'égalité; c'étoit celle qui met extérieurement au même niveau tous les esprits et tous les caractères; on vouloit cette égalité qui pèse sur les hommes distingués, soulage la médiocratie jalouse.¹¹⁴

In sum, Mme. de Staël's egalitarianism represented a major break with the perspectives of the Old Regime as typified by Montesquieu's monarchical model. Yet she refused to accede to the more generous perspectives that prevailed during the later phases of the Revolution. Her egalitarianism embodied a variety of formulations, incorporating both "arithmetic" and "proportional" forms of equality. Still it remained in many respects a narrow ideal, historically bound to the defense of the tiers.

Representative Government:

Both the republican model depicted in Des circonstances actuelles and the monarchical model of the Considérations were classified by Mme. de Staël as forms of representative government. In the previous chapter we saw that she considered representative government to be that political type most suited to her own era: direct democracy was inconceivable given the extended geographical dimensions and transformed cultural perspectives of modern life. Representative government, as she would define it, was structured to protect and maintain those values (liberty and equality)

entailed by man's nature, which formed the legitimate basis of modern political arrangements. Already in her adolescent essay, Lettres sur Rousseau, Mme. de Staël described representative government as a guarantor of liberty, "J'oserai blâmer Rousseau cependant de ne pas regarder comme libre la nation qui a ses représentans pour législateurs, et d'exiger l'assemblée générale de tous les individus;"¹¹⁵ in Des circonstances actuelles, she identified it as a necessary condition of political equality, "il ne peut pas y avoir de doute que le gouvernement représentatif est le seul qui maintienne le principe immuable de l'égalité des droits politiques."¹¹⁶ It was the category Mme. de Staël applied to her republican and monarchical models, and despite fundamental differences between the two constructs (during her republican phase, Mme. de Staël rejected heredity as a principle of legitimacy, though she later recognized it in her monarchical model), both are related by elements common to her notion of representation. Mme. de Staël's most careful investigation of the concept of representative government occurs in Des circonstances actuelles; the concept is invoked in the Considérations, but little explored despite the adjustments seemingly necessitated by her political accommodation of the hereditary aristocracy. Accordingly, Mme. de Staël's discussion of the concept in Des circonstances actuelles will serve as the focus of my own inquiry, though I shall refer to her English model in the course of the following analysis and examine it more closely by way of conclusion.

Again it is instructive to view Mme. de Staël's concept of representative government as a departure from the monarchical model depicted by Montesquieu (Montesquieu's model of England offered a nearer approximation to Mme. de Staël's ideal; nonetheless he failed to investigate the question of representation in any sustained manner). The idea of representation implicit in Montesquieu's model of the French monarchy had origins in feudal thought. Accordingly, his units of representation were orders, groups, corporations, etc.; his representative bodies were conceived as intermediary channels between their mandatories and the sovereign.¹¹⁷ These views did not survive the French Revolution. As revealed in the Constitution of 1791, the "nation" had both replaced the "group" as the fundamental unit of representation and succeeded the monarch as the locus of sovereignty. These new perspectives, in turn, shaped the role of the representative. Because he was no longer considered the agent of particular interests, but rather of the nation as a whole, the representative could not be bound by the mandate of his electoral constituency. The national will (which embodied the "general" interest, as distinguished from the aggregate of either individual or group interests) remained to be determined by the representatives themselves, deliberating as a body within the legislative assembly. Within this broadly defined framework, however, there remained generous ground for disagreement over the nature and functions

of political representation. Was the national will to be "discovered" or "created" by the representatives? Was their role essentially active or passive? What constituted the essence of representation -- authorization by election? the descriptive similarity of the representatives to the nation? the activity of governing in the national interest? What were the limits of the representatives' authority and functions? What institutional arrangements were most compatible with the representative principle? Such issues subtly divided ideological allies like Sieyès and Roederer (the former maintained that the national will was created by the legislative deputies, while the latter appeared to suggest that it was discovered),¹¹⁸ as well as muddled the efforts of individual thinkers. Mme. de Staël's own concept of representation is most fully appreciated against this background, for not only do her writings display a lucid awareness of the manifold intricacies of the concept, but they also mirror much of the confusion that plagued the thought of her contemporaries.

The intellectual reorientation that placed l'intérêt général at the center of representation directly informed Mme. de Staël's own position. In Des circonstances actuelles she expressly rejected the view that limited personal interests could form the basis of representation, "... ce sont les intérêts de la nation, et non les individus qui la composent, qui sont représentés."¹¹⁹ Nor could she accept the idea of representation by occupational group proposed by

thinkers like Sieyès, who, in the Discours du 2 thermidor, had amended his earlier views on the nature of "l'unité nationale:"¹²⁰

On a proposé, de nos jours, de diviser la représentation en députés négociants, agriculteurs, hommes de lettres, etc., et cette idée eût été bonne, si les états de la société étoient séparés. ¹²¹

Having cleared the board of competing concepts of representation, Mme. de Staël turned to set forth her own theory. The essence of representation was, she maintained, the exercise of power on behalf of l'interet general:

Voici celui qui me paraît l'essence du gouvernement représentatif: c'est ce sont les intérêts de la nation ... qui sont représentées. ¹²²

Her attention was directed to the standard of judgment applied by the representatives (i.e. what constitutes the general interest?), rather than to the degree of "literal" or "descriptive" resemblance between the legislator and the nation:

... il me suffit de prouver que le principe de la représentation n'est point ni la proportion des représentants avec les représentés, ni l'unité de la représentation, ni sa toute puissance. La représentation n'est pas le calcul de réduction, si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, qui donne en petit l'image du peuple. ¹²³

Now Mme. de Staël sometimes spoke otherwise; indeed her argument that representative government was a modern substitute for the direct democracy of the ancients ("Les citoyens sont trop nombreux pour discuter ensemble, trop éloignés du centre pour s'y transporter: ils nomment un fondé de pouvoir, pour discuter leurs affaires à leur place")¹²⁴ seemed to suggest that it should replicate, to

the greatest possible degree, the assemblage of the whole people.¹²⁵ This view, however, was inconsistent with her fundamental position which entailed the promotion of the intérêt général with an elitist doctrine of representation. The national interest was to be determined, she argued, by an assembly of representatives whose superior capacities were proven by their victories in open electoral competition:

La représentation, c'est la combinaison politique qui fait gouverner la nation par des hommes élus et combinés de manière qu'ils ont la volonté et l'intérêt de tous.¹²⁶

Here, then, are two key elements in Mme. de Staël's concept of representation: authorization by election and the promotion of the general interest.

Given this view of representation, the burden of analysis must shift to Mme. de Staël's concept of the general interest. Let us again proceed negatively. She invoked the concept to discredit the claims of her political opponents: both the absolutists and radical republicans represented interests hostile to the intérêt général, and thereby "facticus." In both cases, interest was interpreted as a self-regarding calculation: thus the aristocrats favored the restoration of ascriptive privileges; thus the masses aspired to the lawless acquisition of property. As distinct from these narrow political claims, the intérêt général embodied the interests of all; its content was the common good. Mme. de Staël clearly intended for l'intérêt général to serve as an equivalent of

Natural Law, i.e. to contain an objective transcendent standard of right, "un principe éternellement vrai."¹²⁷ Unlike Natural Law, however, the general interest was taken to be congruent with the interests of a particular social group -- the middle class, whose subjective claims embodied norms of universal validity. Mme. de Staël's concept of general interest thus straddled the line between subjectivity and objectivity in a manner analogous to the volonté générale of Diderot and Rousseau. Diderot¹²⁸ had sought the objective foundations of morality in "each individual" (considered as a member of a common humanity), while Rousseau,¹²⁹ to the same purpose, had invoked the will of the community. For Mme. de Staël, the criterion of objective truth was to be discovered within the claims of a distinct social class and hence temporally rooted in the historical emergence of that class (the dimension of history did not figure in the formulations of either Diderot or Rousseau; in this respect, as well as by her focus on the category of social class, Mme. de Staël anticipated Marx). From this view, it is also significant that Mme. de Staël spoke interchangeably of l'intérêt général, la volonté générale and l'opinion publique. The concept of opinion had been, throughout the history of political thought, essentially pejorative: Plato's distinction between the subjective, prejudiced, shifting half-truths of opinion and the objective universal truth of knowledge continued to make itself felt well into the eighteenth century. Mme. de Staël at

once embraced and transcended this distinction; by identifying the interests of the middle class with l'opinion publique, she retained the subjective sociological content of the concept, while simultaneously transforming it into an objective standard of right.

Apart from the tension between objectivity and subjectivity contained in Mme. de Staël's concept of public opinion, there is also the question of whether this opinion exists "prior to" or as a "result of" the activity of the legislative representatives. Is it "discovered" by the deputies or "created" by them? The answer to this question entailed consequences central to Mme. de Staël's political thought. If public opinion exists as the autonomous disposition of the middle classes, then it can operate as a restraint on governmental action. If, however, it remains to be created by the deputies, then it no longer functions as a negative check but as a positive means of enlisting support; it serves as an instrument of consensus-building. This distinction was conflated in Mme. de Staël's writings; hence, to those of her interpreters concerned only with the positive role of public opinion in her thought, she has become a precursor of totalitarianism;¹³⁰ to those concerned only with its negative face, she has been heralded as a champion of liberty. Actually, both strands are present in her thought.

Already in Montesquieu's Book XIX discussion of the English constitution, there were anticipations of Mme. de

Staël's negative model of public opinion. He had, it will be recalled, attributed the alertness of the English to the operation of their government to the commercial spirit of the nation, and specifically to the institution of public credit. This theme was, in turn, taken over and expanded by Jacques Necker who, in the judgment of Paul Palmer,¹³¹ must be credited with having first detailed the political significance of public opinion. Throughout his writings, Necker insisted that public credit depended on the views which "actual and potential holders of government securities entertain with respect to the stability and integrity of the government;"¹³² such views, held by the middle class, Necker classified as "l'opinion publique." Its principal function was to operate as a negative check or sociological safeguard against the abuse of power, "... c'est l'ascendant de l'opinion publique, qui souvent plus qu'aucune autre considération, oppose des obstacle en France aux abus de l'autorité."¹³³ Accordingly, it was regarded by Necker as "un pouvoir invisible," existing independently of political authority. Its autonomous status was emphasized by Necker in his historical account of the emergence of public opinion in France as the unintended consequence of the policies of Louis XIV:

Louis XIV, pendant longtemps, n'avoit connu de l'opinion publique que ses faveurs, et il ne craignoit point de le mettre en crédit. Elle ajoutoit à la gloire du Monarque une plus grande solemnité: et comme elle s'occupoit entièrement de lui, il crut sur la foi de sa grandeur personnelle, que les Rois pourroit, dans tous les temps, en demeurer les maîtres et les régulateurs. Il se trompa. Le mouvement des esprits, l'émulation

des talens, le desir passionné de la louage, toute cette agitation nouvelle dont Louis paroissoit l'astre vivifiant, acquit insensible une force qui lui devint propre; et lorsque ce grand Monarque s'eteignit, les idées et les sentimens qu'il avoit faire animées, qu'il avoit faire naître, devenus plus indépendans, se développèrent sous divers formes ...¹³⁴

Although Necker had maintained that the development of public opinion was aborted in a republic because its citizens valued their individual opinions too highly to agree on a common ground, Mme. de Staël applied her father's insights to her republican model as well as her model of the English monarchy (Necker's own preferred political form). Following Necker, she regarded public opinion as the product of commercial society and closely linked to the growth of the national debt. It was formed independently of political authority and revealed a fixed content: "l'amour de répos, le desir d'acquérir de la fortune, le besoin de la conserver."¹³⁵ With respect to the operations of government, public opinion was directed at limiting the range of political action to the maintenance of order and the protection of property. This latter function, as indicated in her definition, embodied two kinds of interests: "... il y a deux grands intérêts, deux intérêts élémentaires, pour ainsi dire, qui se partagent le monde: le besoin d'acquérir et celui de conserver."¹³⁶ A bicameral legislature was necessary to accommodate both interests which, more broadly viewed, represented the principles of "le mouvement et la durée."¹³⁷ In the monarchy, the principle of conservation was to be upheld by an aristocratic upper chamber. During

her republican period, however, Mme. de Staël had abandoned her support of the French aristocracy, although she continued to regard them as guardians of the "conservative" spirit:

De quelque manière que vous combinez les privilèges, vous leur donnez bien un intérêt commun avec la nation. C'est l'esprit conservateur...¹³⁸

Yet as the aristocracy was allotted no role in the legislative process, institutional measures alone had to differentiate the dispositions of the two chambers: "vous placez les principes démocratiques sous la sauvegarde des formes aristocratiques ..." ¹³⁹ By refining the general interest into two component elements -- "le besoin d'acquérir et celui de conserver" -- Mme. de Staël was able to introduce a variant of Montesquieu's doctrine of mixed government into a framework which, on its face, appeared to preclude it. This strategy will be examined more carefully below. For the present, we may note its contribution to the idea of limited government compatible with the negative face of public opinion. Hence the mutual checking of "le mouvement et la durée" as a way of balancing (or even stalemating) political power:

Leurs institutions [referring to those of the ancients] n'avait point pour but la stabilité, l'immobilité, pour ainsi dire, des affaires publiques ... En France on croira que si le gouvernement n'agissait pas, tout irait mieux. ¹⁴⁰

Public opinion, thus conceived, may broadly be defined as a diffident alertness to the policies of government based on the conviction that the meaningful realm of

life is properly private. It was rooted in a view of the political as a realm of coercion, wholly devoid of moral content yet essential to the orderly functioning of society:

Tout pouvoir politique est institué contre le crime; la vertu rend inutile la puissance, ou la puissance flétrit la vertu. Ce que les hommes mettent en commun, ce sont les vertus négatives: ne pas se nuire, ne pas se voler, ne pas se détruire ¹⁴¹... Le gouvernement alors a plus besoin de contenir que d'exciter. Il est à sa place, quand il fait les fonctions de barrière ... ¹⁴²

Trained exclusively on the operations of government, public opinion functioned as a sociological check against political usurpation:

Il ne peut pas y avoir d'usurpateur dans un pays ou il faudroit que le même homme rallait l'opinion à lui, depuis le Rhin jusqu'aux Pyrenées ... ¹⁴³

This theme Mme. de Staël carried over into her portrait of England in the Considérations.¹⁴⁴ She depicted public opinion as a strong, steady yet calm disposition, analagous to Necker's conception of "un pouvoir invisible:"

Dans un empire où deux partis opposés se combattent avec fureur, il y a bien peu d'opinion publique ... Il existe cependant une masse dans la nation, toujours inerte, toujours immobile, qui, dans les temps de trouble, n'a d'autre soin que de connaître le parti le plus forte, afin de s'y rallier. Cette masse est bien tentant d'opprimer, tant elle s'y prête de bonne grace, pèse cependant à la longue dans un même sens et, du moment qu'il y du calme, murmure tout bas une sorte d'opinion publique... ¹⁴⁵

Public opinion did not, then, remain to be created by the legislative representatives; rather it existed autonomously as the moderate critical disposition of the middle class toward the government. It was, accordingly, this disposition that the representatives had to discover and abide by:

On ne peut pas détruire son influence, car c'est celle de tous et de chacun. On ne peut pas faire changer d'avis, car il ne veut rien que son bien-être. On peut bien, tant qu'on est en guerre, oublier qu'elle existe, mais comme elle est la véritable puissance nationale, des qu'on voudra fonder le gouvernement sur la nature des choses, il faudra que cette opinion soit ralliée à la République, ou le gouvernement ne s'établira pas. 146

Thus the following assumptions are entailed by the negative image of public opinion: 1) the political realm operates on principles distinct from the private; 2) because the essence of the political is coercion, it cannot be a force in shaping men's characters; 3) because of the narrow province of the political, the quality of political leadership is not of prime concern -- it is sufficient that ambitions be moderate and powers constitutionally limited; 4) public opinion is a temperate self-centered disposition that operates autonomously as a negative check on the government. None of these assumptions apply to the positive image of public opinion.

The positive image of public opinion was intimately connected to, although not synonymous with, the concept of intérêt général. But whereas the general interest had previously been seen to emanate from the pre-existent disposition of the electorate, it was now the national representatives themselves who defined its content. In both cases, the general interest remained as a transcendent ideal; what shifted was the locus of its determination. From this new perspective, the function of the representative -- presently conceived as the possessor of superior moral and intellectual attributes -- was to apprehend the common imperative and re-

veal it to the nation. With regard to the determination of the general interest, the role of the electorate was now clearly passive:

Néanmoins, pour goûter et pour pratiquer cette liberté qui réunit tous les avantages des vertus républicaines des lumières philosophiques ... il faut dans la peuple beaucoup de raison, et dans les hommes de la première classe beaucoup d'études et de vertus. ¹⁴⁷

With regard to the acceptance or reception of the representatives' determination, however, the public assumed an active posture. Hence Mme. de Staël's second image of public opinion as the positive social force of esteem which bestowed political rewards on the most worthy members of the elite and inspired the emulation of all men. In contrast to its first image, public opinion was now seen to originate in response to the activities of the political elite; it was generated rather than discovered by the nations's representatives. As before, it was linked to the attitudes of the bourgeoisie, since that class possessed the active right of suffrage; nonetheless, in a broader sense, it embraced the non-propertied classes as well. When it operated in the context of a free society, public opinion served as a standard of political legitimacy, as well as a basis of social cohesion and moral direction.

Public opinion had thus been transformed from a diffident guard of private interests into a positive expression of public approval which served as a vehicle of development for both the rulers and the ruled. Mme. de Staël's concept of l'intérêt général expanded to accommodate this shift in

perspective: whereas its content had been previously restricted to the maintenance of order and protection of property, it now came to include the determination of moral values. As a consequence, the representative became the guardian of the nation's ethical standards -- a role which conferred on him the right to demand from his constituents the sacrifice of their private pleasures:

Je oserai dire que mon père est le premier, et jusqu'a présent, le plus parfait model de l'art d'écrire pour les hommes publics, de ce talent d'en appeler à l'opinion, de s'aider de son secours pour soutenir le gouvernement, de réanimer dans le coeur des hommes les principes de la morale, puissance dont les magistrats doivent regarder comme les représentans, puissance qui leur donne seule le droit de demander à la nation des sacrifices. ¹⁴⁸

The premises of this argument warrant close examination.

Unlike the first image of public opinion, the second rested on the assumption that public and private realms operate on analogous principles. From this view, Mme. de Staël regarded the family not only as the cornerstone of the civic order, but also as a microcosm of the political. She distinguished four categories of marriage: the two of which she approved, I shall call the "happy" and "dutiful" marriage; the two of which she disapproved, the "unhappy" and the "static." Significantly her criteria of evaluation are identical to the criteria she elsewhere applied to judgments of the political.

The only distinction to be drawn between the "happy" and "dutiful" marriage was the absence from the latter of spontaneously given love.¹⁴⁹ Both types of marriage, however,

embodied an identical structure of authority: a ruling element, the husband, whose position derived from superior merit and wisdom; and a ruled element, the wife, whose own development was contingent on the emulation of her husband. Thus Mme. de Belmont, a character in Delphine, emphasized the hierarchical structure of her "happy" marriage:

Four que le mariage remplisse l'intention de la nature, il faut que l'homme ait pour son merite réel un véritable avantage qu'elle reconnoisse et dont elle jouisse ... le plus grand des plaisirs, c'est cette admiration du coeur qui remplit tous les momens, donne un but à toutes les actions, une emulation continuelle au perfectionnement de soi-même, et une place auprès de soi la véritable gloire, l'approbation de l'ami qui vous honore en vous aimant.¹⁵⁰

By contrast, the "unhappy" marriage was characterized by the moral baseness of the husband, and the consequent degradation of the wife. Yet another variant was provided by the "static" marriage in which the husband was praiseworthy, but failed to develop the virtues of his wife. Because the element of emulation was lacking, the relationship could not be truly satisfying to either partner. The model for this marriage is taken from the portrait of English domesticity presented in Corinne (Mme. de Staël did not develop this theme in her more sympathetic treatment of England in the Considérations):

... en Angleterre, des intérêts des divers genres qui honorent l'humanité, les hommes, dans quelque retraite qu'ils vivent, ont toujours les moyens d'occuper dignement leur loisir; mais l'existence des femmes, dans le coin isolé de la terre que j'habitois, était bien insipide ... représentez-vous ce que c'était pour moi que d'être assise autour d'une table à thé plusieurs heures par jour après dîner ... tous les quarts d'heure il s'élevait une voix qui faisoit la question la plus

insipide ... enfin, les Messieurs revenoient, et ce moment si attendu n'apportoît pas un grand changement dans la manière d'être des femmes: les hommes continuoient leur conversation auprès de la cheminée, les femmes restoient dans le fond de la chambre, distribuant les tasses de thé; et quand l'heure de départ arrivoit, elles s'en alloient avec leurs époux, prêtes à recommencer le lendemain une vie que différoit de celle de la veille que par la date de l'almanach. 151

In this model, then, the isolation of the marital partners inhibited the beneficial development of esteem and its attendant principle, emulation.

When applied to the realm of politics, this positive force of moral approbation translated as public opinion. Public and private realms thus operated on analogous principles. Mme. de Staël spoke similarly of a dominant-subordinate political relationship based on the exceptional worth of the ruling element:

Le principe d'une république ou l'égalité politique est consacrée, doit être d'établir les distinctions les plus marquées entre les hommes, selon leurs talens et leurs vertus. 152

The ruled element had to be developed through the emulation of its leaders:

La république doit donner beaucoup plus d'essor que tout autre gouvernement à ce motif d'emulation; elle s'enrichit des travaux multipliés qu'il inspire ... il ne faut pas ôter aux grandes âmes leur dévotion à la gloire; il ne faut pas ôter aux peuple le sentiment d'admiration. De ce sentiment dérivent tous les degrés d'affection entre les magistrats et les gouvernés. 153

If the first image of public opinion was exclusively trained on delimiting the power of the political elite (with the implication that representatives were men of ordinary talents and moderate ambitions), the second demanded great

statesman capable of winning the esteem of the nation. Thus Mme. de Staël spoke of the "aristocratie naturelle" which would emerge from open competition for public office.¹⁵⁴ The idea of representatives forming a natural aristocracy was not uncommon among thinkers of the Revolutionary period.¹⁵⁵ In De la littérature, however, Mme. de Staël took the concept a step further in the direction of romanticism by positing the ideal of the statesman as genius and emphasizing the protean quality of his excellence. Significantly, this vision not only was incompatible with the idea of a deliberative representative assembly (as it stressed the individual excellence of the genius above the collective wisdom of the elite), but also unwittingly endangered the constitutionalist dimension of her thought:

... lorsque la nature du gouvernement promet à l'homme de génie la puissance ... des vainqueurs dignes de remporter un tel prix ne tardent point à se présenter... il faut pour le bonheur du genre humain, que les grands hommes chargés de sa destinée possèdent presque également un certain nombre de qualités très différentes; un seul genre de supériorité ne suffit pas pour captiver les diverses classes d'opinions et d'estime; un seul genre de supériorité ne personifie point assez ... l'idée qu'on aime à faire d'un homme célèbre. ¹⁵⁶

The other face of the disinterested sentiment of esteem was the self-interested desire for reputation. Worthy men did not, like Plato's Philosopher-Kings, reluctantly accept public office, but actively aspired to it. This applied to Mme. de Staël's republican model ("La république ... ne faut pas ôter aux grands âmes leur devotion à la gloire"),¹⁵⁷ as well as to her model of the English monarchy ("La considération publique en Angleterre est le premier but des hommes en

pouvoir."),¹⁵⁸

Thus public opinion was not the moderate self-centered disposition of the first image, but rather an other-directed sentiment of sometimes high intensity (ranging from esteem to enthusiasm). It was the vehicle, not for the protection of private pleasures, but rather for the shaping of men's characters in which the statesman now assumed a prominent role. Like the negative concept of public opinion, it required that the operations of government be given a great degree of publicity. But whereas from the first perspective, public scrutiny was essential for the purpose of preventing usurpation; from the second, it was indispensable (recall the analogy of the "static" marriage) to the moral development of the citizenry, i.e. the deportment of the statesman providing a model for national emulation. In sum, the representation of public opinion had shifted from an act of discovery to an act of creation.

Although it played a central role in her political thought, Mme. de Staél's concept of representation was neither systematic nor consistent. In its essentials -- representation being defined as the exercise of power on behalf of the general interest -- it was clearly a product of the intellectual perspectives of the Revolution. Consequently Mme. de Staél rejected the idea of explicit mandates from the electors, although she hesitated between regarding the general interest as a pre-existent disposition

of the electorate (suggesting an implicit, generalized and diffuse mandate) or as the determination of the representatives themselves of the transcendent interest of the nation. Each position entailed a distinctive view of the general interest; each was predicated on a different set of assumptions concerning both the nature of the political and the role of the representative.

The relation of the concepts of representation found in Mme. de Staël's monarchical and republican models present a second set of difficulties. Unlike the republic, the monarchy included an upper legislative chamber composed of an hereditary aristocracy. While open to recruitment from below, it nonetheless was not an elected body; hence the criterion of "authorization by election" that Mme. de Staël had earlier posited as a condition of representation was not fulfilled. Moreover the recognition of "aristocratic" interests appears to contradict her republican insistence that the exclusive subject of representation was the intérêt général. It will be recalled, however, that Mme. de Staël had envisaged the general interest not as monolithic, but rather as composed of two types of interests -- "le besoin d'acquérir et celui de conserver" -- the latter being aristocratic in nature. She slipped through this loophole in the Considérations to legitimate the political representation of the nobility: in England, she maintained, there was no contradiction between the promotion of the general interest and the recognition of the claims of the aristocracy.

THE THERMIDORIAN REPUBLIC:

A reluctant convert to republicanism, Mme. de Staël had long shared her father's admiration for the English monarchy. Her attachment to the monarchical form of government prompted her public support for the Constitution of 1791, although she privately expressed concern over its provisions for a unicameral legislature and weak executive. As for the alternative of a republic, she summarily dismissed it as ill-suited to France. The events of Thermidor compelled Mme. de Staël to reconsider her position. The republic had survived the Terror: to resume an active political life she would have to come to terms with the new constitutional order. The fact that she never condemned republican institutions as intrinsically pernicious, but only as incompatible with the social and historical circumstances of the French nation, facilitated her new posture of accommodation. Accordingly, it was to relativist principles that she turned, in the Réflexions sur la paix intérieure, to justify her conversion to republicanism:

Hériter du trône, ou le reconquérir, sont deux actes extrêmement differens: l'un est passif comme la loi, l'autre appartient à toutes les passions des hommes¹ ... en France, vers quel roi, depuis la mort déplorable de l'infortuné Louis XVI, vers quel roi, dans l'ordre legal, peut-on tourner les yeux, qui ne se soit montré l'ennemi de la liberté ... La France peut s'arrêter dans la république; mais pour arriver à la monarchie mixte, il faut passer par le gouvernement militaire, Tel est le changement qui s'est fait dans la révolution depuis trois ans, qu'aujourd'hui la proclamation de la constitution de 1791 réjouiroit les roi et attristeroit hors de France tous les amis de la liberté.²

The two works central to the understanding of Mme. de Staël's concept of republicanism are Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution et des principes qui doivent fonder la République en France and De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales; two earlier pamphlets anticipated their arguments, Réflexions sur la paix, and Réflexions sur la paix intérieure.

Mme. de Staël composed Des circonstances actuelles in collaboration with Benjamin Constant and began work on De la littérature³ during the latter half of 1798, while a victim of exile for her role in the Fructidor coup d'état. The royalist challenge of Fructidor was only one in a series of attacks which had buffeted the Republic between extremes of the Left and the Right. On the Right, there were the royalist uprisings of Quiberon and Vendémaire, the pre-Fructidor electoral crises, and the incendiary polemics of Papist reactionaries like Joseph de Maistre and the Abbé Barreul. On the Left, the Republic confronted the opposition of the Jacobins (whose hostility to the Constitution the Directorials were prone to exaggerate), and the insurrection of the Babouvists, with their call for the abolition of private property and the wholesale leveling of economic, social, and political inequalities. Significantly, the same year that Mme. de Staël wrote Des circonstances actuelles, the Directory had for the second time violated the constitution on the pretext of saving the republic: The coup d'état of Floréal (May 1798) had forcibly squelched the electoral victories

of the Jacobins, as the coup of Fructidor had earlier done to those of the royalists. Des circonstances actuelles represents Mme. de Staël's attempt to deliver the Republic from its periodic bouts with political crisis by widening the base of its popular support. To this end, she proposed major revisions in the Directoral Constitution, as well as a thorough reassessment of the ethical, social, and intellectual foundations of the republican order. Always, Mme. de Staël's proposals were geared to the practical problem of consensus-building, which she interpreted as the need to bridge all shades of moderate opinion. Thus her republicanism steered a precarious middle course between radicalism and reaction.

What did Mme de Staël mean by republican government? The question admits of no clear answer, but can be illuminated by the application of Montesquieu's analytical framework. Classified by its "nature", the republic's sovereignty resides in the people as a whole who rule according to fixed laws. This formulation must, however, immediately be qualified in two ways: first, active participation in political life is confined to the middle class; and second, the political power of the "nation" is not exercised directly, but through the medium of representatives. Nor is Mme. de Staël's republic a direct descendant of Montesquieu's model of English representative government. It is distinguished both from Montesquieu's and her own model of England (to be developed in the Considérations) by its exclusion of hereditary institutions.

Virtue was the animating passion, or principle, that Montesquieu ascribed to the republic; it connoted selfless devotion to the common good achieved through discipline and austerity. Mme. de Staël, too, seized upon virtue as the distinctive principle of the republic, although she understood the term quite differently than her predecessor and incorporated it into her argument with far less consistency. As interpreted by Mme. de Staël, virtue was a function of man's innate character rather than a product of disciplined self-denial; it referred to man's natural tendency towards his fellows, his sentiment of sympathy. And whereas for Montesquieu virtue had only a political relevance, it was regarded by Mme. de Staël as the foundation of both public and private morality. She was not alone in perceiving the significance of virtue to the post-Thermidorian republic. Similar tributes to man's natural sympathy and benevolence are to be discovered in the political writings of the Ideologues. But while they derived man's instinct of sympathy from his faculty of self-love, Mme. de Staël appeared to adopt the Rousseauian view that moral sentiment existed apart from egoism.⁴ From the standpoint of practical politics, arguments for the priority of natural virtue served the position of the moderates who sought to identify a spring of government equally distant from the austere "civisme" of the Jacobins and the artificial feudal ethos of honor. Moreover, an appeal to man's natural benevolence to his fellows well-suited their strategy of comprehensive

political reconciliation.

In certain passages, however, Mme. de Staël appeared to shift the mainspring of republican government from virtue to self-interest, a move that brought her more into line with the teachings of the Ideologues. Like them, she grounded her arguments in a double appeal to nature and historical progress: by nature, man's self-interest dictated his ends and means; while from a historical perspective, man's self-seeking character was best realized in the modern setting of representative institutions and commercial society. Within this framework the ego's pursuit of happiness translated as economic man's pursuit of security and prosperity -- goods which Mme. de Staël associated with property-ownership. I shall shortly examine her concept of property, but what requires emphasis here is that she regarded the ego's pursuit of material satisfactions as both privately oriented (each man's happiness being subjectively defined) and pluralistic (economic satisfactions are multiple and accessible through a variety of routes). Her arguments presupposed a market model of society, in which individualistic self-seeking was spontaneously reconciled with the general good defined in terms of stability and prosperity. While Mme. de Staël offered little explanation of the mechanics of this model, she did elaborate upon its consequences for the conceptualization of the political. Corresponding to the view of society as the realm of spontaneous actions and worthwhile endeavor, government was envisaged as a coercive

power instituted for the sole purpose of protecting persons and property against criminal invasion. Its value was exclusively negative: government contributed neither to man's happiness nor to his moral perfection:

Tout pouvoir est institué contre le crime ... ce que les hommes mettent en commun, ce sont les vertus négatives: ne pas se nuire, ne pas se voler, ne pas se détériorer ... 5

The priority of self-interest, then, entailed a disposition of diffident alertness towards the state lest it abuse its prerogatives to encroach upon individual rights and private initiative (recall the negative face of public opinion). The sanctity of man's private sphere was further secured by constitutional constraints on the state as well as by the modern emergence of political representation which, by substituting an indirect form of government for the self-government of the ancients, enlarged man's capacity to pursue his private satisfactions:

C'est un grand bien, je le crois, pour la majorité des hommes que cette possibilité d'exister isolément des affaires publiques; ce repos inconnu aux anciens, c'est l'avantage des grands associations d'hommes, c'est une chance de plus de bonheur donnée à la diversité des caractères. 6

Civic involvement, even the mere act of electing a representative, was looked upon as a burdensome necessity, as a cost borne by the citizen to secure the protection of his individual interests.⁷ Loyalty to the republic stemmed from its guarantee of civil liberties and protection of property rights; material self-interest lay at the core of modern patriotism. This version of politics defined itself against

the classical republican apotheosis of civic virtue and self-abnegation -- ideals which Mme. de Staël ascribed to the Jacobins and renounced as utopian and brutal.

Notwithstanding Mme. de Staël's apparent disdain of communitarian ideals, she was sensitive to the Jacobin charges that the apotheosis of egoism led to social disintegration. At the same time that she defended material self-interest as a realistic basis of commitment to the republic, she grudgingly acknowledged her opponents' claim that under the Directory egoism had become synonymous with greed and rapacity:

L'argent est devenu le seul moyen d'indépendance, le premier bonheur, l'unique espoir de salut ... On ne cherche plus l'estime, parce qu'il n'existe ni gloire pour les puissants, ni intérêt pour les victimes ... ces divers causes démoralisent entièrement la plupart des hommes.

In the wake of a revolution which had rent the fabric of society, overturned prevailing norms, and unleashed the anarchic passions of the masses, France was in need of a more positive social bond. But whereas the radical Left had sought a remedy in Montesquieu's image of classical anti-quity, Mme. de Staël, taking a more innovative route, attempted to translate the ancient principle of civic virtue into a form palatable to the post-Revolutionary commercial society. Her strategy pivoted on the introduction of a third psychological spring into the republic: the motive of higher self-interest. Unlike the narrow form of egoism described above, it referred to man's thirst for esteem, ranging from a desire for respect from members of one's

intimate circle to, on its highest level, the desire for public recognition of one's outstanding service to the nation. Nowhere is the synthetic quality of Mme. de Staël's intelligence shown to better advantage than in this ingenious reconciliation of modern egoism with ancient civic self-renunciation. Anticipations of this formulation may be found in Montesquieu's model of England. However Montesquieu placed greater stress on the unintended public benefits of individual self-seeking, whereas the concept of higher self-interest entailed the conscious and deliberate performance of publically oriented deeds (albeit ultimately for self-interested ends). Her analysis also owed much to eighteenth century Scottish theories of human nature (assimilated by Benjamin Constant during his tenure at Edinburgh), which focused on man's innate need for social approbation and discussed the relation of "reputation" to true "praiseworthiness." Like her Scottish predecessors, Mme. de Staël optimistically assumed esteem and merit to be intrinsically interconnected. As it suited her political strategy, she oscillated between basing this assumption on man's "sentiment de beau,"⁹ an intuitive faculty combining ethical and aesthetic judgment, and the qualities of reflective wisdom inhering in property-ownership. I shall develop these themes below.

The principle of higher self-interest suggested a mode of politics quite dissimilar to that entailed by materialistic egoism. The latter, as we have seen, was

characterized by a night-watchman state, a devaluation of political leadership and a common good defined in terms of order and stability -- features commonly associated with the classical liberal tradition as developed from Locke. The motive of higher self-interest turned away from this vision of politics, for its ancestry was civic humanist rather than Lockean. The civic humanist tradition, which evolved from Aristotle to embrace a wide variety of formulations, diametrically opposed the Lockean by its emphasis on the educative aspects of political life, and specifically by its claim that the moral and rational fulfillment of the individual was contingent upon his acting as a citizen (i.e. as a conscious and autonomous participant in the decision-making community). It directly informed Montesquieu's model of the republic, and indirectly influenced his vision of England. Although this was precisely the style of thought for which Mme. de Staël denounced the Jacobins, she did not hesitate to admit it into her own political vision through the back door of higher self-interest. My earlier discussion of public opinion already introduced this aspect of her teaching which I shall now examine in greater detail.

Higher self-interest was linked to Mme. de Staël's meritocratic conception of government, according to which political rewards (ego-serving ends) were conferred by the electorate in recognition of deeds publicly performed in the service of the common good. Depending upon whether

Mme. de Staël referred to passive non-propertied citizens or active propertied electors, the approbation of the electorate issued from distinct sources (though this is not made explicit in her writings). With regard to the non-propertied, its spring was the "sentiment de beau," that unerring instinct of ethical-aesthetic appreciation common to all men. As for the active citizens, their role was to confirm rationally the spontaneous insight of the unpropertied masse. Property, which had been previously associated with the narrowly selfish ideal of profit, was now conceived in terms of leisure, recalling Aristotle's condition of fitness for citizenship. ("C'est la condition du loisir qui importe dans la condition de propriété.")¹⁰ Thus seen, property-ownership was essential to the cultivation of rational judgment needed to discern talent and assess performance.¹¹ As a criterion of political leadership, however, property-ownership was insufficient; the further requirement of open electoral competition served to ensure that only the most outstanding candidates were rewarded with public office. The fortune and reputation of the elite thus turned on the public display of their exceptional qualities. Analogously, the fortunes of the non-elite pivoted on the successful emulation of their superiors. Disinterested sentiment or reason were the faculties with which true merit was discerned, yet it was the egocentric motive of higher self-interest that impelled men to behave meritoriously:

La république doit donner beaucoup plus d'essor que tout autre gouvernement à ce mobile d'émulation; elle s'enrichit des travaux multipliés qu'il inspire ...¹²

The passage also suggests that Mme. de Staël had in mind a theatrical image of politics, according to which the political elite promotes the public good, not through legislative enactment (which would patently contradict her valuation of negative liberty), but rather through moral example, magnanimous civic gestures, and public-spirited exhortation. Thus we find Mme. de Staël supremely concerned with the personal character of the statesman, and with his abilities as an orator and publicist. Significantly, in De la littérature, the statesman is indistinguishable from the man of letters:

La vraie dignité du langage est le meilleur moyen de prononcer toutes les distances morales, d'inspirer un respect qui améliore celui qui l'éprouve... Lorsque les premiers magistrats d'un pays possèdent cette puissance, elle forme un lien volontaire entre les gouvernans et les gouvernés.¹³

Through the reciprocal principles of reputation and emulation that governed relations between ruler and ruled, the way was paved for a reconciliation of civic virtue with the representative government of the moderns. If direct personal participation was no longer possible, the electorate might still participate in an on-going empathy with their representatives, an empathy concretized in the act of voting. The indispensable function of the electorate was to endorse and give meaning to the "natural aristocracy." It is striking to observe the contrast between

this conception of voting and the defensive "opportunity-cost" version supported by Mme. de Staël's previous arguments. While she continued to espouse an ego-centered scheme of government, this formulation, which reconciled higher self-interest with a commitment to the common good, remained faithful to the tenets of civic humanism: through the display and emulation of civic virtue, rulers and ruled were bound together in the service of the public good, raising the nation as a whole to a higher level of civic excellence.

In seeking to define the various strands of Mme. de Staël's thought, I have perhaps been guilty of attributing too great a consistency to her arguments. While the positions delineated above were sometimes clearly and logically expounded in her writings, more often they were confused and conflated. Her political polemics -- articulating a simple antithesis between ancient and modern liberty -- concealed the true complexity of her intellectual posture. If Mme. de Staël proudly ranked herself among the apologists of the emergent commercial order, she simultaneously retained an allegiance to classical ideas of civic humanism that ill-accommodated her opposition to the Jacobins. Not only did the two strains run parallel in her writings, they also interested and overlapped one another. Civic humanist premises were coupled with classical liberal conclusions, or a single set of facts made to serve both types of argument. Thus she sometimes attached the label "natural aristocracy" to the bourgeoisie as a class, illogically but

tendentiously linking the middle class commitment to moderation and stability with elitist displays of outstanding civic virtue. Similarly, the motive of emulation inspired men to seek ever greater material gains, as well as to cultivate their capacities as citizens. Public opinion functioned both as a safeguard against despotic encroachments of government and as a vehicle of civic education. The tensions between these two strains of Mme. de Staël's thought crystallized in her conception of property. And since property served as the cornerstone of her republic, it is appropriate to turn to consider its meaning and role in her politics.

We have seen that property figured in Mme. de Staël's two concepts of self-interest: in the first, it was conceived in terms of "profit," the material condition of individual happiness; in the second, it afforded the opportunity of "leisure," the temporal condition of citizenship. Before pursuing these more abstract themes, however, I shall examine the role of property within the constitutional structure of Mme. de Staël's republic.

First, the direct exercise of political power was confined to the propertied classes. Prior to 1796 Mme. de Staël had advocated a restricted franchise¹⁴ but later came to defend the two-stage election provided for in the Constitution of the Year III that formally extended the suffrage to the poor but, through the intermediary institution of electors, effectively mitigated their political power. Such a scheme, she contended, offered the advantage of reconcil-

ing the potentially disruptive masses to the bourgeois republic¹⁵ while consolidating actual political control in the hands of a propertied elite, whose commitment to the defense of property rights and to the maintenance of internal order was ensured by their material self-interest. At best, this arrangement secured a governing elite of exceptional talent and accomplishment. Second, property-ownership assumed a distinctive role within the framework of the upper legislative chamber. Members of the Council of Elders were to receive, along with tenure for life, a generous lifetime annuity subsidized by funds from the State Treasury or national properties.¹⁶ By this measure, Mme. de Staël sought to imbue the upper chamber with a "conservative spirit" in order that it may function as a counterweight to the dynamic and precipitous popular Assembly.¹⁷ Viewed more broadly, this scheme, in which property played a key role, may be seen as Mme. de Staël's attempt to preserve the spirit of an aristocratic upper chamber within a republic that denied the legitimacy of ascriptive privilege; it is the strategy by which she adapted Montesquieu's sociological interpretation of the division of powers to the post-Revolutionary era of middle-class rule.

Ambiguities in Mme. de Staël's argument stemmed not only from the disparate categories of political goods with which property-ownership was associated (stability, civic virtue, conservative attitudes), but also, in a more fundamental respect, from her failure to clearly define the meaning of property. The problems of definition and justifi-

fication were, in fact, intimately joined. The tension central to Mme. de Staël's definition of the term -- her glossing over the distinction between "real" (or landed) and "mobile" property -- contributed directly to the more abstract confusions of political justification. To account for the presence of these tensions in her thought, it is necessary to consider both the intellectual traditions which nourished her theorizing and the practical purposes of her politics.

While the relation between politics and property has been of perennial concern to theorists since classical antiquity, it is the debate between Court and Country in Augustan England that proves most immediately relevant to our inquiry. J.G.A. Pocock¹⁸ has brilliantly demonstrated the importance of this initial confrontation between the values of the landed aristocracy and the entrepreneurial values of commercial society for subsequent liberal thinking, as well as drawn attention to the ambiguities in Court and Country rhetoric that may be seen to prefigure the confusions of Mme. de Staël. Country writers who sought to defend aristocratic society against the emergent commercial order, formulated a strategy adapting the arguments of civic humanism. This style of thought (which I have already identified in Mme. de Staël's writings) was premised upon a valuation of public above private goods and a concept of personality pivoting on individual autonomy and active participation in civic life. The material foundation of Augustan civic humanism was landed property, passed along the generations through inheritance. This mode of property,

which endowed the political order with the stability of tradition, embodied two key conditions of citizenship -- independence and leisure. Both heightened the proprietor's capacity to concern himself with the common good. First, the landowner, being economically independent of the government, was in a position to identify his particular good with the public good rather than with the private interests of his political leaders. Second, land ownership afforded the leisure time to cultivate the high level of mental and moral excellence needed to discern the broad interests of the community. Based upon this conception of landed property, the Augustan ideal of civic virtue was defined in terms of moderation, experience, prudence and sensitivity to inherited convention -- traits characteristic of the hereditary aristocracy. A second strand of Augustan thought, typified by Bolingbroke's ideal of the patriot king,¹⁹ built upon these premises a far more dynamic conception of civic virtue, stressing the exemplary role of public displays of civic and moral excellence. In either case, these Augustan ideals were imperiled by the newly emergent "mobile" forms of wealth, which entailed private dependencies on political rulers (via patronage, salaries, and the public debt) and selfishly preoccupied men's thoughts with the exigencies of profit-making. Whereas the aristocracy stigmatized such developments as "corruption", Court defenders of commercial society offered a new set of social values within which the new modes of wealth could be legitimated. Yet, as Pocock cautions,²⁰ it would be wrong to assume that apologists of

the new socio-economic order effected a clean break with the ideology of their opponents. Civic humanist ideals continued to furnish categories of thought, contribution to inconsistencies and ambivalences in the arguments of Court writers.

Acknowledging these complexities (which suggest the quality of Mme.de Staël's intellectual inheritance), I may proceed to outline the contours of the Court position. Defenders of the new financial order substituted for the rational autonomous publicly oriented personality of Augustan civic humanism the concept of "economic" man, motivated by his interests and appetites to pursue diverse particularistic material satisfactions. The economic order that corresponded to this conception of man was distinguished by mobile forms of wealth (ensuring that the enjoyment of material satisfactions was open to all), social interdependence (commercial interchanges; specialization of labor enabling greater productivity), competition, innovation and expansion (multiplying the variety of attainable satisfactions). Accordingly, the civic values inhering in "landed" property no longer obtained: the recognition of historical continuities had been vitiated by the emergence of mobile and shifting social relations: the valuation of leisure gave way to the valuation of profit; particularistic ends replaced communitarian objectives; reason ceased to denote a determination of the general good independent of the promptings of ego and came to refer to the calculus of self-interest or, more broadly, to the cosmopolitan intelligence arising from the expanded horizons and advance of learning which accompanied

the spread of commerce; virtue was transformed from a rational principle of civic life into the non-rational instinct of benevolence which governed men's private relations.²¹ Court thinkers, while continuing to speak of a "common good," severed it from its civic humanist ties to man's moral self-realization and associated it instead with the utilitarian ideals of general happiness and prosperity.

The values implicit in the new socio-economic order gave rise to a number of differing conceptions of politics, two of which we shall consider here. The first, exemplified in the writings of Mandeville, regarded government as a positive collaborator in the individual's pursuit of self-interested ends. It defended lavish governmental expenditures, the establishment of a national debt, banking and credit facilities, political patronage and corruption on the grounds that such practices promoted general prosperity and well-being-- material progress rather than liberty was the core value of this position. A second version of politics restored liberty to the status of a primary good, ascribing to the government the more limited role of providing a stable framework for the private pursuit of gain. With the business of government exclusively confined to the protection of private property, liberty (i.e. non-interference by government in legal transactions) was erected as the value which defined the individual's relation to the state. However, it is important to distinguish this concept of liberty from that dear to the civic humanists: for the latter, liberty was identified with the principles of autarchy and autonomy; while

for defenders of commercial society, liberty referred exclusively to the absence of governmental interference, and thus was compatible (and indeed presupposed) the presence of intricate social and economic interdependencies. (This distinction provides crucial background to the insight that Mme. de Staël stated before Tocqueville and Mill, namely that a liberal constitution provides no adequate guarantee against social pressures).

The relevance of the Augustan debate to post-Thermidorian France remains to be demonstrated. Ironically, the findings of recent historiography appear to suggest that any such assumption is unwarranted. The work of Alfred Cobban²² and others has exposed the fallacy of viewing the epoch of the Revolution as the dawn of bourgeois-capitalism, as well as of analyzing the Revolution's dynamics in terms of a simple contradiction between the rising bourgeoisie and the feudal aristocracy. They point out that the "middle class" leaders of the Revolution consisted primarily of professionals and political office holders rather than merchants, manufacturers or financiers. The Thermidorian elite was comprised of war contractors, profiteers and speculators; the pace of economic development under Thermidor and the Directory - as even the Marxist historian George Lefebvre²³ acknowledges - fell far below that of the pre-Revolutionary years. On an ideological plane, however, these empirical facts did not deter apologists of the middle class like Mme. de Staël from framing a strategy which extolled the benefits of advanced commercial society. Indeed

may be argued that France's own underdeveloped economy impelled these thinkers to borrow and adapt arguments formulated across the Channel. Had not Anglophiles like Montesquieu, Voltaire and Necker led the way? We have seen, for example, how Montesquieu's model of England reconciled the self-interested motives of a commercial order with the ideal of a common good. Thus the Thermidorians met the challenge of the reactionary aristocracy with intellectual strategies derived from the earlier efforts of English Court writers. Mme. de Staël's polemical intentions were more complex. Her attempts to reconcile the interests of the bourgeoisie and the nobility led to confusions in her argument between the competing claims of Court and County. Moreover, she perceived that both strategies of argument could be turned against the radical Left to justify the exclusion of the indigent masses from active involvement in politics.

Two aspects of Mme. de Staël's treatment of property have their origins in the arguments of the Country. Her efforts to rally the support of moderate émigrés still chary of the Republic prompted the first, or aristocratic, conception of property already alluded to in my discussion of the upper legislative chamber. Against the sweeping indictment of the nobility leveled by republican extremists, Mme. de Staël acknowledged the aristocracy's legitimate role in the protection of conservative interests -- a role contingent upon their status as owners of landed inherited

wealth. The preservation of aristocratic interests within a republican framework could be accomplished, she argued, by the provision of a generous lifetime annuity to deputies of the upper chamber. Both modes of wealth were fixed and permanent; both could thus be expected to embody the values of independence and leisure essential to the cultivation of reason, civic virtue and attitudes of restraint ("Vous placez les principes démocratiques sous la sauvegarde des formes aristocratiques ...").²⁴ The fact that aristocratic interests were not uniquely defined by property-ownership, but reflected the historical myths of sang and épée as well, was ignored in Mme. de Staël's proposal. Moreover, within the course of the treatise, she shifted from the argument that aristocratic interests must find an equivalent in the era of middle class rule to the position that middle class interests, being universal in character, include the legitimate interests of the aristocracy.²⁵ From this view, she referred to the twofold character of bourgeois interests: "le besoin d'acquérir et celui de conserver."²⁶ Granting this assumption, why then is the conservative bias of the upper chamber dependent on the "artifice" of an annuity? More importantly, Mme. de Staël's subtle shift in perspective confused conservatism rooted in civic virtue and tradition with conservatism based on the self-interested prudence of economic man. Later, in the Considérations, Mme. de Staël further confounded the distinction by her efforts to provide the bourgeoisie with a historical pedigree rivaling that of the aristocracy.

Such confusions prefigured the social schizophrenia of the Doctrinaires, who oscillated between portraying the bourgeoisie as an open universal class and seeking to legitimate it as a new aristocracy.²⁷

We have seen that property, in its Court-inspired meaning, also figured in Mme. de Staël's writings as a condition of exalted political leadership. While as before property was linked to the values of independence and leisure, these values were now enlisted to serve the dynamic goal of cultivating the protean genius of the statesman (as opposed to the specialized expertise of commercial man):

... c'est pour écarter le talent qu'on attacheoit à persuader que les pensées qui servent à former le philosophe profond, le grand écrivain, l'orateur éloquent, n'ont aucune rapport avec les principes qui doivent diriger les chefs des nations ...²⁸
un seul genre de supériorité ne personnifie point assez, si je puis m'exprimer ainsi, l'idée qu'on aime faire d'un homme célèbre.²⁹

Mme. de Staël's concept of the statesman as a model of moral, intellectual and civic excellence thus picked up the thread of Bolingbroke's Patriot King. Ironically this line of argument (though detached from conceptions of property-ownership, independence and leisure) later flowed into the romantic apotheosis of the political hero that found its fullest expression in the myth of Napoleon.

Notwithstanding Mme. de Staël's assiduous efforts to achieve a synthesis of aristocratic and bourgeois values, her defense of each ultimately rested on a distinct set of premises and drew upon separate intellectual traditions. Just as the Country tradition informed her view of the aris-

tocracy, that of the Court nourished her defense of the middle class. In her capacity as an apologist of the bourgeoisie, she referred to a contractarian theory of government and to property as a socially created right ("La propriété est le résultat du contrat social")³⁰ -- ideas antithetical to the organic conception of political society espoused by the aristocracy. This Court-inspired formulation had been invoked by revolutionaries like Mirabeau to justify the confiscation of church and émigré properties during the early phases of the Revolution. By acknowledging it in her own writings, Mme. de Staël hoped to prove her allegiance to the Revolution to those who suspected her of continued aristocratic sympathies. Yet she could not go on to accept the logical extension of this premise as articulated by the more radical revolutionaries -- namely, that the state could lawfully interfere to bring about a more equitable distribution of goods. She insisted instead upon a minimal state and the sanctity of property rights, rebutting the radicals with arguments that again echoed the ideology of the Court. She proposed that the general happiness of nations was advanced when each citizen remains free to determine his own economic activities and can be assured the fruits of his labor. From this premise followed the diversity and specialization of enterprise (owing to the diversity of men's talents and personalities) which conduced to national prosperity. The pace of progress was accelerated by the competitive pursuit of gain (providing impetus to industry and ingenuity), as well as by the en-

larged intellectual and cultural horizons that resulted from the expansion of commerce. Political stability was a beneficial consequence of the privatization of men's lives and their reluctance to jeopardize their material well-being by either waging war or engaging in revolutionary activities.³¹

Such arguments presupposed a universe of mobile forms of property, open to the aspirations of all; these forms, while embracing landed wealth (now available for purchase as a consequence of the confiscation of ecclesiastical and aristocratic properties), extended to include commercial, industrial and financial capital. As Court thinkers before her, Mme. de Staël undertook to establish the legitimacy of these new forms of wealth by appealing to egocentric principles and a utilitarian good that was the unintended outcome of individual self-seeking. To a greater degree than her predecessors, she made explicit the implications of this position: the middle class was the bearer of the legitimate interests and the ultimate destiny of society as a whole. From this view, Mme. de Staël emphasized the distinctiveness of aristocratic and bourgeois interests: the former, rooted in descriptive privilege; the latter, rooted in material well-being, offering advantages open to all. In response to her opponents on the Left, Mme. de Staël pointed out that these same benefits of middle class society were contingent upon a minimal state, i.e. protection of the widest possible area of privacy (in the Considérations, however, her defense of the National Debt jeopardized the primacy of this value).³²

Mme. de Staël enlisted two strategies in her defense of property rights: her positive strategy, as we have just seen, entailed the apotheosis of middle class interests; her negative strategy, which I am about to examine, called for the sweeping repudiation of all claims on behalf of the non-propertied. These claims ranged from the Babeuvist call for the abolition of private property to more moderate Jacobin proposals for universal suffrage and a system of progressive taxation. The broad diversity of these goals was ignored by thinkers like Mme. de Staël, who indiscriminately dismissed them all as anarchistic assaults on the sanctity of property. Despite her professed posture of moderation and compromise, she failed to appreciate the subtlety of thinkers like Langlet, who attempted to reconcile the recognition of property rights with the need for social reform.³³ She disregarded the Jacobin claim that the formal ideal of the rule of law was effectively nullified by the existence of vast socio-economic inequalities. As to the charge that "equality of opportunity" (strictly conceived as the principle of "careers open to talent") took no account of the fundamental disadvantages arising from inequalities of wealth, Mme. de Staël oscillated between two responses. Sometimes she appeared to share the facile optimism of Condorcet who looked forward to technologically produced material abundance and universal embourgeoisement; more often, she accepted with complacency Voltaire's view that poverty was inevitable and unavoidable.³⁴ Nor was Mme. de Staël sympathetic to the demand for universal political rights, despite her recognition

of the positive civic and moral value of political participation. Rather than grant effective political power to the poor,³⁵ she hoped to cultivate their loyalties to the republic through the motive of emulation. Yet for those suffering extremes of hardship and privation, this seemed at best a hollow ideal. At worst, it was unacceptably arrogant.

If Mme. de Staël invoked the still potent image of the Terror to discredit the political claims of the poor, the theoretical scaffolding of her indictment was indebted to the traditions of Court and Country. Their respective defenses of property-ownership were deployed a contrario to condemn the motives and interests of the non-propertied. This strategy is immediately apparent in Mme. de Staël's depiction of the poor as creatures of impulse, passion, and appetite.³⁶ Driven by their immediate physical needs, the non-propertied could neither rationally discern the broad interests of the community nor engage in the calculations of self-interest which would lead them to value social order and stability. As opposed to the anarchism of the poor, the interests of the aristocracy and the middle class were congruent with the maintenance of internal peace: the former, deriving from the stability of tradition; the latter, from the property-owner's material stake in the existing order.

I now turn from a consideration of the psychological springs of the republic to an examination of its governmental structure. Mme. de Staël attached much importance to the question of constitutional arrangements, as she per-

ceived an intimate connection between liberty and the rule of law. The presence of fixed and settled procedures of government eliminated the resort to violence as a means of resolving conflict, and hence provided the condition of secure expectations that entered into her definition of a free society. Indeed, Mme. de Staël was frequently given to exaggerating the importance she attributed to the institutional requisites of liberty (when, in fact, her analysis placed greater stress on its sociological conditions), as in her argument that the "end" of the Revolution could be achieved wholly by means of constitutional reform: "Ce sont les défauts de la Constitution qui perpétuent la Révolution.." ³⁷. Her interpretation of the events of the eighteenth Fructidor revealed a similar perspective: "18 fructidor, c'est le droit de dissoudre le parlement d'Angleterre, violemment exercé parce qu'il n'en existait pas un moyen légal.." ³⁸

The constitutional theory of Des circonstances actuelles developed and elaborated the arguments Mme. de Staël had first set out in the Reflexions sur la paix intérieure. The polemical purposes of both works were identical: to build a consensual basis for the republican constitution through a reconciliation of moderate royalists and modern republicans. This political imperative translated into constitutional terms as the reconciliation of the revolutionary doctrine of popular sovereignty with Montesquieu's version of the separation of powers. Thinkers like Sieyès had demonstrated the incompatibility of

the two theorists: the former, committed to the unity of the sovereign power and the unrestricted exercise of its will; the latter, entailing the division of sovereign power and a system of checks and balances. The separation of powers accommodated by Sieyès' scheme derived from Rousseau's distinction between the power to will (legislative) and the power to act (executive);³⁹ sovereignty remained wholly vested in a unicameral legislature, unchecked by the subordinate powers of the executive branch. Sieyès' formulation shaped the contours of the Constitution of 1791, though it received its most extreme expression in the Montagnard Constitution of 1793. The Thermidorians, while indefatigably rehearsing the horrors of the Terror and the dangers inherent in the concentrated exercise of political power, compromised the principle of popular sovereignty only to the extent of restructuring the franchise and substituting a bicameral for a unicameral legislature. Yet even this latter concession to Montesquieu was nullified, in Mme. de Staël's view, by the fact that both legislative chambers were structured to operate on identical principles. Moreover the Constitution of the Year III continued the revolutionary tradition of rejecting the doctrine of checks and balances in favor of the "pure" theory of the separation of powers. Like the Constitutions of 1791 and 1793, it naively relied on the spontaneous harmony of all efforts to articulate the national will and thus failed to provide legal channels for dealing with conflicts between the branches of the government.

Against this background, Mme. de Staël's position becomes clearer. A defender of the Revolution, she acknowledged that popular sovereignty must be retained as a principle of constitutional theory. Yet she also insisted that the Revolution had swung so sharply in the direction of democracy that important questions concerning the limitation and control of political power had been seriously neglected. Foreshadowing Constant's brilliant discussion in the Principes de politique, Mme. de Staël perceived that liberty ultimately depended not on the source or ends of political power, but rather on its scope or extent. The consent of the governed offered no guarantee against the arbitrary exercise of political power; moreover, to the extent that the electorate was widened, the probability of abuse was increased:

Les Républicains savent si bien que le résultat des élections abandonnées à elle-mêmes serait très défavorable au maintien de la République ...⁴⁰

The reconciliation of republican and liberal traditions presented Mme. de Staël with a formidable dilemma. Her solution was ingenious; she detached the idea of popular sovereignty from the principle of absolute unchecked legislative authority, while retaining it as a normative ideal that would function akin to natural law as a standard of assess-political performance. (The Doctrinaires later adopted a similar strategy.)⁴¹ The content of the national will remained ambiguous, as did its relation to the constitutional arrangements of the Republic.

Rejecting arguments for a determinate institutional sovereign, Mme. de Staël pleaded on behalf of a balanced constitution embodying a system of pluralized and decentralized political power. Her proposals represented yet another attempt to revive the legacy of Montesquieu, whose reputation had waned steadily during the course of the Revolution despite the efforts of loyal disciples like Mounier, Lally-Tollendal and Necker. For Mme. de Staël, Montesquieu's skepticism of unchecked power, concern with the mechanics of political and social conflict, and categories of constitutional analysis retained an enduring value. Thus she adopted as a principle of good government the doctrine of the separation of powers which Montesquieu had interpreted in both a functional and a social sense. The Thermidorian constitution reflected a purely functional interpretation of the doctrine, providing for a division of powers among a two-chambered legislature (a Council of Elders comprising 250 members over forty years of age and either married or widowers; a Council of Five Hundred, of which the minimum age was thirty, retained the right of initiative; one third of each chamber was replaced annually) and a five member executive Directory appointed by the Elders from a list of candidates nominated by the Five Hundred. Mme. de Staël's objections to the structure of the constitution, while ostensibly directed at its inadequate differentiation of political functions, were in reality addressed to its failure to incorporate the older con-

ception of government as a partnership of distinctive social virtues. Given the prevailing republican antipathy towards the claims of the aristocracy, this mode of argument had to be hidden behind the language of function:

Mêlant ensemble les individus, sans cesser de distinguer les pouvoirs, vous auriez un ensemble de gouvernement toujours d'accord au lieu d'avoir créé deux camps sous les armes.⁴²

Nonetheless Mme. de Staël insisted that the popular Council of Five Hundred be animated by the spirit of innovation, while the Council of Elders embody the aristocratic principle of conservation -- to which end its deputies must be chosen for life and receive permanent annuities, rather than be subject to triennial election as in the case of the Council of Five Hundred. This owed more to the traditional theory of mixed government than to the functional separation of powers doctrine. To be sure, Mme. de Staël stressed that she had adapted aristocratic virtue to the era of middle class rule; that ascriptive privilege was irrational and incompatible with the utilitarian principles of the republic.⁴³ She recognized that the protection of aristocratic interests required such concessions to the ethos of republicanism. Hence it was by juridical means (differing lengths of tenure, modes of selection, etc.) that a balance of social forces had to be re-established. In her attempt to find a republican surrogate for the aristocracy, Mme. de Staël showed far greater sensitivity than her colleagues to Bentham's charge that the institutional separation of powers offered

no guarantee against the passage of discriminatory social legislation.⁴⁴ Yet while she proclaimed the validity of this insight as it applied to the interests of the aristocracy, she chose to ignore its logical extension to the interests of the non-propertied.

For Mme. de Staël, the most critical defect of the Thermidorian constitution was its failure to provide for a system of checks and balances. Because of this omission, there existed no constitutional means for adjudicating disputes between the branches of government -- a situation she deemed responsible for the violent coups of Fructidor and Floreal. The republican framers of the constitution presupposed a consensual rather than a conflictual relation between the branches,⁴⁵ and, still sensitive to the despotism of the Old Regime, had opposed equipping the executive with constitutional powers to check the legislature. As a disciple of Montesquieu, Mme. de Staël took a more positive view of political conflict, the beneficial effects of which she sought to institutionalize in the structure of government. Hence she advocated that the executive body be vested with a suspensive veto, as well as the power to dissolve the Council of Five Hundred and call new elections.⁴⁶ The lower legislative chamber would retain the initiative,⁴⁷ while the Council of Elders would be empowered with the broad prerogatives that Sieyès proposed for a jurie constitutionnaire.⁴⁸ The realities of political conflict must, she insisted, be confronted head-on: either disagreements between the

branches are resolved through constitutional channels, in which case liberty is preserved and strengthened, or by means of violence, in which case liberty is destroyed:

Le lendemain d'un acte constitutionnel, tous les pouvoirs, tous les individus sont à leur place. Le lendemain d'une crise, quel tyran, quel factieux, ne conçoit de criminelles espérances?⁴⁹

Yet Mme. de Staël laid equal stress on the need for cooperation and coordination between the governmental branches.⁵⁰ From this perspective, the right of dissolution served not only as a means of channeling political conflict, but also as a means of obtaining consensus for policies that reflect the national will. Accordingly, Mme. de Staël proposed that in the event new elections failed to secure majority support for the policies of the Directory, its members be required to resign.⁵¹ Other proposals, too, were designed to establish positive links between the executive and legislative branches: ministers must be chosen from the Council of Five Hundred and retain a presence in the Council in order to ensure open channels of communication;⁵² members of the Directory should be elected from the Council of Elders, to which they must return upon expiration of their term of office.⁵³

Mme. de Staël combined her examination of the institutional requisites of the republic with an awareness that behind the formal apparatus of government lay a constellation of social forces which buttressed its operations. This systemic vision of political society remained Montesquieu's greatest legacy to his disciple, and Mme. de Staël

showed no reluctance in openly appropriating his categories of analysis. Thus she examined the social, economic, religious and cultural determinants that would provide for the optimum functioning of republican government.

Perhaps a still more important use of Montesquieu was related to his hypothesis that social sanctions could serve as an equivalent to law by functioning to restrain men's passions and maintain order. Mme. de Staël adapted this insight to defend her conception of the minimal state. her argument flowed along two lines: the necessity of coercive state interference is reduced to the extent that alternate forces operate to instill social discipline and cultivate public virtues; the likelihood of state interference is reduced to the extent that these same forces train the public to assume a skeptical and critical attitude toward the exercise of political power. William Godwin, whose Enquiry Concerning Human Justice Constant was in the process of translating and to whom Mme. de Staël referred frequently in the course of Des circonstances actuelles,⁵⁴ had pushed these arguments to their logical extreme, linking the improvement of social institutions with the complete dissolution of the state apparatus. Not only did Mme. de Staël insist upon a clear distinction between the advocacy of a minimal state (which was consistent with Montesquieu's irreducible structure of social control) and Godwin's anarchism (which was not), but her thought always retained a dimension which extolled the positive potentialities of the

political. As we shall observe, this duality pervades her treatment of the republic's social determinants.

Mme. de Staël's discussion of republican manners and customs again displayed her concern to establish a mean between the extremes of reaction and radical revolution. She expressly maintained that social behavior must neither affect the intricate artificiality of the Old Regime nor the indiscriminate egalitarianism demanded by the lowest classes. Republican manners must instead be anchored in nature, and nature reveals that men are unequal in talents and abilities. Civility, which, in a republic, ought to guide men's relations with their fellows, takes into account these natural distinctions:

... l'urbanité des mœurs ... conserve à chaque homme le rang que son mérite doit lui obtenir dans le monde. Elle marque le degré de considération auquel chaque individu s'est élevé, et, sous ce rapport, elle dispense le prix, objet de travaux de toute la vie. 55

Moreover, Mme. de Staël perceived an intimate link between civility and tolerance, that value essential to the free play of ideas which was a defining characteristic of liberal society:

L'urbanité des mœurs peut seul adoucir les aspérités de l'esprit de parti; elle permet de se voir longtemps avant de s'aimer, de se parler long-temps avant qu'on soit d'accord. 56

Thus seen, civility of manners served both positive and negative conceptions of the political: it upheld standards of meritorious political leadership and promoted emulative civic virtue, while it simultaneously maintained the social discipline which lessened the need for control by the state.

If public intercourse in the republic was governed by civility, intimate society was bound by ties of natural sentiment. Again nature provides the norm, but within this context, Mme. de Staël referred to the bonds of friendship, conjugal affection, and parental love. The focus of her attention was the family unit. I have already discussed at length how she viewed the strengthening of domestic life as a prime contributor to the privatization of experience that resulted in the movement towards the minimal state. Conversely, we have also seen how the dominant-subordinate husband-wife relationship paralleled the structure of the political meritocracy, and thus how the family functioned as the chief agency of political socialization. Both perspectives, however, shared a common celebration of family life, making Mme. de Staël among the earliest and most important contributors to the liberal myth of domesticity.

Yet for all her ardent tributes to family life, Mme. de Staël was no single-minded exponent of the cult of domesticity. She recognized a profound tension between her commitment to tolerance and equal opportunity and a social ethos which automatically consigned half the nation to the duties of home and hearth. This contradiction within liberal society impinged most acutely on the woman of genius, who would flaunt social convention to develop her talents and pursue a public career. It was thus in relation to the woman of genius that Mme. de Staël came to acknowledge the oppressive face of social sentiment. Earlier

than Tocqueville or Mill, she perceived the duality of public opinion as the guarantor of social probity and the enforcer of intellectual mediocrity. Unlike her heirs, Mme. de Staël applied this insight only to the predicament of the superior woman. In the republic, she envisaged that women would not only enjoy the widest opportunities to cultivate their talents, but would gain predominance in the realm of literature.

Peut-être seroit-il naturel que, dans un tel état, la littérature proprement dite devint le partage des femmes, et que les hommes se consacraient uniquement à la haute philosophie.⁵⁷

Mme. de Staël failed, however, to reconcile adequately this assumption with her view that the inward-turning domestic unit provided an essential support of liberal society; her argument that few women would in fact opt to pursue a public career evades the logical paradox of her position. Lastly, she refused to extend the principle of sexual equality to the sphere of politics, and thus to follow Condorcet as an advocate of women's suffrage. The woman's apolitical posture, Mme. de Staël maintained (contradicting her positive view of the political), was essential to her role as the nation's moral conscience:

Il n'y a que ces êtres en dehors des intérêts politiques et de la carrière de l'ambition, qui versent le mépris sur toutes les actions basses, signalent l'ingratitude⁵⁸

Religion figured prominently as a social force in the republic. Mme. de Staël's discussion of religion, which comprised an entire chapter of Des circonstances actuelles, was indebted to Montesquieu as well as to Necker's

own De l'importance des opinions religieuses; in keeping with this intellectual tradition, she focused on the social utility of religious belief rather than on its intrinsic merits. In broad terms, she valued religion for promoting moral probity, bridling men's passions, and cementing the ties of family and community.⁵⁹ Further, she repudiated the view, common to many Enlightenment thinkers, that religious belief was less necessary to the educated strata than to the peuple:

Les idées religieuses me paraissent également nécessaires à tous les hommes, à tous les degrés d'instruction. L'immoralité des esprits plus grossiers a des caractères et des effets plus remarquables, mais les hommes éclairés étant appelés à influer davantage sur le sort de leurs semblables, peuvent produire plus de mal avec des torts moins saillants ..⁶⁰

Mme. de Staël's broadly conceived valuation of religion did not prevent her from asserting the superiority of certain creeds, nor did it desensitize her to the relativist dimensions of religion as it functioned within distinctive social and political milieus. In the republic, religion performed an essential role by lessening the need of state control. Because republican government enshrined the values of liberty and equality, it encouraged a pluralistic society and the free play of divergent opinions. To prevent this salutary conflict from degenerating into anarchic disorder, religion was needed to internalize moral norms and set explicit bounds to permissible behavior.⁶¹ The religion most appropriate to republic institutions, Mme. de Staël contended, was Protestantism. In contrast to Catholicism with its emphasis on hierarchy, unquestioning obedience, and dogma

(principles congruent with an absolute monarchy), the Protestant faith promoted political liberty by its stress on reason, freedom of conscience, individual autonomy and humanitarian ideals. Clearly, this was a value-laden as well as a descriptive comparison. For Mme. de Staël, Protestantism was also to be preferred over Theophilanthropy, a deistic cult that had attracted a considerable following among the elite of the Directory. She pointed to the necessary role of ceremony in awakening man's moral sentiments⁶² (Theophilanthropy had eschewed ceremony completely, while Catholicism had ever-emphasized it), as well as to the civic dimension of the Protestant ideal of public service, "Les ministres protestants sont pères et citoyens"⁶³ (emphasis mine). Montesquieu, under the influence of early Huguenot thinkers, had written of a connection between Protestantism and free political societies in De l'esprit des lois;⁶⁴ Necker later devoted a treatise to the same subject. Mme. de Staël carried forward this tradition, exploring both its historical and structural implications for post-Revolutionary French society. By transmitting this heritage to her disciples, she laid the foundations of the liberal Protestantism of the Restoration.

Mme. de Staël's treatment of the economic determinants of the republic has been covered earlier in this chapter. Portraying the republic as a modern commercial society, she emphasized that the enjoyment of material prosperity went hand in hand with a commitment to social stability and moderation. Tocqueville, who like Mme. de Staël was concerned

to adapt the ancient principle of civic virtue to modern conditions,⁴⁶ would later make much of this insight.

Of the various social forces that shaped the republic, its cultural determinants engaged Mme. de Staël's most sustained attention. Indeed the entire second half of De la littérature was given over to the study of literature as related to the context of republican society. Her analysis was not, as some critics have implied,⁶⁶ that crude literary determinism later practiced by positivists like Comte. Mme. de Staël viewed literature not simply as the "end product of an external determinate causality,"⁶⁷ but as a semi-autonomous realm influenced (rather than determined) by its surrounding social environment.

Mme. de Staël combined a descriptive analysis of republican literature as shaped by its distinctive social context with an evaluative and critical conception of literary activity. She wrote:

... j'examinerai l'état des lumières et de la littérature en France depuis la révolution; et je me permettrai des conjectures sur ce qu'elles devroient être et sur ce qu'elles seront, si nous possédons un jour la morale et la liberté républicaine ...⁶⁸

Literature was to serve as the primary channel for the mass communication of republican values -- values which, being rooted in man's nature, defined the content of an eternal morality. Mme. de Staël thus slipped from a relativist conception of literature to one which implied the presence of absolute standards: "human nature" providing the model for republican aesthetics. She emphasized the practical

function of republican literature as a moralizing and socializing agent, drawing attention to its heightened role within the context of post-Revolutionary society. The writer's immediate task was to re-establish social norms and standards in the wake of a disorienting revolution; the destruction of the traditional authority of the nobility and the intrusion of the unbridled force of the masses having combined to produce a fragmented and atomized society ill-suited to the introduction of constitutional rule. His permanent task was the creation of the enlightened public opinion upon which republican government rested. The republican writer, as distinguished from his historical predecessors, subordinated the pursuit of aesthetic perfection to the practical improvement of mankind and society. He was, in contemporary terms, self-consciously engagé:

Dans le siècle de Louis XIV, la perfection de l'art même d'écrire étoit le principal objet des écrivains; mais dans la dix-huitième siècle, on voit déjà la littérature prendre un caractère différent. Ce n'est plus un art seulement, c'est un moyen; elle devient une arme pour l'esprit humain, qu'elle s'étoit contentée jusqu'alors d'instruire et d'amuser. 69

Mme. de Staël's broad definition of literature encompassed "les écrits philosophiques et les ouvrages d'imagination, tout ce qui concern enfin l'exercice de la pensée dans les écrits, les sciences physiques exceptées."⁷⁰ Prominent among the types of literature she examined was the political tract (les écrits polémiques). In Des circonstances actuelles two categories of polemical writings are distin-

guished -- those in book form and those in the press. The former, she held, must enjoy complete freedom while the latter submit to government censorship. Mme. de Staël supported this surprising position with the following argument: books are of adequate length to cogently develop arguments and engage men's reason; newspapers demand brevity, distort fact and cater to the passions. In light of this distinction the government should be accorded provisional power to shut presses and jail publishers, while respecting the right of appeal. That Mme. de Staël considered these provisions to be temporary is evident in her allusion to England in the same treatise:

Mais, me dira-t-on, en Angleterre, les journaux sont parfaitement libres. En Angleterre, la Constitution est établie depuis cent ans ...⁷¹

Her position, then, must be appreciated within its historical context; the revolutionary press had indeed used inflammatory language, indulged in rumor-mongering, raised fears and incited violence.⁷² Nor should it be overlooked that Mme. de Staël was herself a frequent victim of vilification by the press, "Quel repos, quel bonheur un tribunal quelconque peut-il rendre à un femme que les journaux ont attaqué?"⁷³ Significantly Mme. de Staël did not repeat the proposal in De la littérature, where she devoted a chapter to "Du style des écrivains, et celui des magistrats." Instead she rehearsed the familiar theme that political leaders must inspire emulation through eloquent language, the communication of lofty ideals, noble sentiments and

solid judgment.

Under the category "imaginative literature" Mme. de Staël discussed the role of comedy, tragedy, poetry and the novel within the republic, as well as how a republican setting contributed to define the content of each genre. Thus she distinguished two forms of comedy: the first, exemplified by Molière's George Dandin, derives its humor from social convention and is appropriate to a monarchy founded on court society; the second, exemplified by Le Misanthrope, mocks the failings of human nature and contains themes universally applicable to all men. The latter Mme. de Staël deemed appropriate to the republic. (Interestingly, Stendhal later maintained that comedy was wholly incompatible with republican society, since men seriously occupied could not laugh.)⁷⁴ Republican tragedy can retain no connection with kings and princes; its protagonists must display feelings capable of being shared by the audience and humble deeds should be exalted to portray nobility of character, "Il faut énoûbler la nature, au lieu de perfectionner les idées de convention."⁷⁵ Republican poetry must exclude visions of the bizarre or supernatural and convey instead "des idées philosophiques ou des sentimens passionés."⁷⁶ It should be melancholy in tone, inducing an air of seriousness appropriate to the spirit of the republic. Mme. de Staël's emphasis on melancholy (which sharply contrasted with her utilitarian valuation of public happiness and her belief in man's perfectibility through the scientific method)⁷⁷ conceivably drew its inspiration from Montesquieu's insight

that free society was complex, fragile and prone to corruption. The novel, the most modern of the literary forms discussed by Mme. de Staël, is the republican genre par excellence. Its subject-matter deriving from domestic situations, it is descriptive of commonplace reality and fitted to the concept of privacy enshrined by the republic. Its focus is psychological, probing the inner emotions of the individual. The novel contained an ethical dimension as well. It imparted moral lessons to the nation by means of plots which portrayed the triumph of virtue:

Le don d'emouvoir est le grande puissance des fictions; on peut rendre sensibles presque toutes les vérités morales, en les mettant en action. ⁷⁸

Because of the novel's mass appeal (being the first genre to treat the lives of ordinary people), Mme. de Staël nourished great hopes for it as a moralizing force.

It is striking to observe that despite Mme. de Staël's emphasis on the modernity of the republic, the literature she cited as models could scarcely be characterized as representative of the avant-garde. Indeed she reached back to Ossian to find the prototypical republican poet and exalted Molière as the father of modern comedy. Among the novelists she singled out for praise were Richardson, Fielding and Rousseau. Nor were Mme. de Staël's theories of the various literary genres original to her. Marmontel had, for example, erected a similar distinction between nature and convention as sources of comedy.⁷⁹ As for the novel, it had become commonplace in Mme. de Staël's day to

associate it with the naturalistic portrayal of "la vie privée." And philosophes like Diderot had frequently regarded literature as a tool of ethics. Mme. de Staël's particular contribution was to incorporate these insights into a distinctive political context, showing how the various genres functioned to support the operative values of the republic.

The idea of modernity, if somewhat obscured by Mme. de Staël's treatment of imaginative literature, was well served by her discussion of philosophical writing under the republic. In this chapter, she espoused Condorcet's theory of social calculus and went on to proclaim positive science as the foundation of republican intelligence. She upheld the Ideologue's claim to have created an empirical science des idées, yielding knowledge of the "simple truths" of human nature on the basis of which a rational social order could be constructed. Scientific technocrats, adept at statistical measurement, would provide the specifications according to which political society could ensure the greatest happiness for the greatest number of citizens:

Pourquoi ne parviendrait-on pas un jour à dresser des tables qui contiendroient la solution de toutes les questions politiques, d'après les connoissances de statistique, d'après les faits positifs que l'on recueilleroit sur chaque pays? ...⁸⁰

This strand of Mme. de Staël's thought, with its emphasis on technocratic knowledge, scientific dirigisme, social harmony and perfectibility, was to receive its fullest expression in the works of St. Simon. Within the compass of

Mme. de Staël's own writings, it was at variance with her deeply ingrained Montesquieuan inheritance; her conflictual theory of liberty and perception of the irreducible complexity of free society. Her concern with the nature of citizenship in modern society -- the individualized emotional rapport between ruler and ruled -- dissolved in the face of mass units of social engineering and impersonal scientific controls.

I shall postpone a general evaluation of Mme. de Staël's republican model until the close of my discussion of the English monarchy. As both were prototypes of Mme. de Staël's ideal of a free political society, it is fitting that they be treated together.

ENGLAND

Up to her public declaration of republicanism in 1795 Mme. de Staël had subscribed with filial devotion to Necker's assessment of the English constitution as the criterion of good government; moreover, she shared his conviction that English institutions were eminently suited to the French experience. As committed Anglophiles, the Neckers lacked neither supporters nor detractors. Indeed England, as the object of either derision or approbation played a strategic role in the constitutional debates of the revolutionary period.¹ To be sure, the image of England varied according to the political purposes of its interpreters. Anglophile parlementaires and members of the noblesse promoted an aristocratic image of England as a means of defending their position first against the Crown (challenging the reforms of Mapeou,² the parlementaires compared themselves to members of the English Parliament)³ and later against the tiers (spokesmen³ for the First Estate advocated the adoption of a Chamber of Peers modeled along English lines).⁴ Against this aristocratic vision, Anglophile reformers had drawn upon Voltaire⁵ and selectively quoted Montesquieu to depict England as a model of an enlightened, libertarian and commercial society. Still another variant was offered by Anglophobe conservatives, for whom England represented a corrupt and anarchical social order.⁶ Anglophobes in the Enlightenment similarly stressed corruption as the characteristic feature of English politics, but unlike the conservatives went on to indict the

British constitution for failing to guarantee an adequate measure of political and civil liberty. For Rousseauian Anglophobes like Sieyès, English bicameralism inhibited the expression of the general will of the nation.⁷

Necker's portrait of England secured him a prominent place in the ranks of the Anglophiles. It owed much to the writings of Montesquieu, as well as to the writings of Montesquieu's Swiss disciple, Jean Louis de Lolme. Like Montesquieu,⁸ Necker posited liberty as the prime value of the English nation; like de Lolme,⁹ he revered England's "balanced" constitution which, through a tripartite division of King, Lords and Commons, was structured to protect that liberty:

Regardons l'Angleterre ... Trois volontés y forment la loi, et une seule est astreinte, par l'usage, au langage concis dont nous venons de parler. Mais cette volonté émane du trône, ainsi son expression est relevée par tous les genres de majesté; et l'on sait de plus que le monarque a eu part à la délibération première, par l'entremise de ses ministres. Les deux chambres législatives sont égales en droit, et la proposition des impôts est la seule initiative réservée à la chambre des communes. Enfin, leur constitution est formée de tous les élémens qui peuvent imposer aux hommes ... le choix du peuple, et pourtant la propriété, l'éducation, les dignités conventionnelles, et par dessus tout, la majesté royale, voilà les différens sceaux apposés en Angleterre aux lois de l'état.¹⁰

Necker emphasized the class basis of the balanced constitution as developed from the older doctrine of mixed government. He maintained that the representation of the aristocracy was desirable not only from the standpoint of practical political realities, but also as an essential condition of liberty and order:

Pourquoi le [the hereditary aristocracy] condamneroit-on, s'il étoit encore une des sauvegardes de la liberté,

s'il mettoit obstacle aux invasions de l'esprit populaire et aux tentatives ambitieuses de monarchie? 11

Necker attempted to absorb the critique of Rousseauian Anglo-phobes into his profile of the aristocracy ("les supériorités héréditaires introduites en Angleterre sont tellement adhérentes à l'intérêt social ... qu'elles semblent ordinées et décrites par une volonté générale")¹² and went on to present an image of England that embodied the philosophical ideals of the eighteenth century. Necker's England was enlightened, libertarian and commercial; it sanctified public opinion and provided its citizens with the greatest opportunities for happiness.

It was this image of England that Necker transmitted to his daughter. If, for a period, she had strayed from his teachings to eulogize the French republic, Mme. de Staël proudly returned to the paternal fold in the Considérations. In that work, England was once again enshrined as a model to be imitated by France:

Nous ne croyons pas que la Providence ait placé ce beau monument de l'ordre social si près de France, seulement pour nous inspirer le regret de ne pouvoir jamais l'égaliser; et nous examinerons avec scrupule ce que nous voudrions imiter avec énergie.¹³

To argue this position, Mme. de Staël had to overcome not only the often grim lessons of her personal experience of British society, but also her theoretical relativism which disallowed the wholesale importation of alien socio-political forms. The renewal of Mme. de Staël's Anglophile convictions was intimately connected to her decision to compose the Considérations as a testament to Necker and a vindication of his

policies. Furthermore, political conditions in France now seemed to augur well for the reception of the British model. England had established her credentials as the foremost opponent of Napoleon and liberator of France; the King and nobility had been restored to French political life; and, as George Kelly has remarked,¹⁴ all other constitutional solutions had already been exhausted. Indeed the Charte of 1814 testified to the degree to which English institutions had inspired French efforts. But because the Charte was "granted" by Louis XVIII as an act of royal grace, it ultimately failed, in Mme. de Staël's view, to meet the standards imposed by the English constitution.¹⁵

As classified by Mme. de Staël, England was a constitutional monarchy of the representative type. Because of its many parallels with her earlier republican model, it is instructive to recall Montesquieu's own rather ambiguous description of England as "une nation ou la république se cache sous la forme de la monarchie." Following Montesquieu's lead, Mme. de Staël designated the "love of liberty" as the motivating passion of the English system. Her concept of liberty retained the meanings already encountered in my general discussion of her political vocabulary and examination of her republican model: its primary components were "security" and "privacy":

Le première base de toute liberté, c'est la garantie individuelle, et rien n'est plus beau que la législation anglaise à cet égard¹⁶... Le gouvernement ne se mêle jamais de ce que les particuliers peuvent faire aussi bien que lui: le respect pour la liberté individuelle s'étend à l'exercice des facultés de cha-

cun¹⁷... il n'est point de nation ou l'on trouve autant d'exemples de ce qu'on appelle l'excentricité, c'est à dire une manière d'être tout à fait original, et qui ne compte pour rien l'opinion d'autrui¹⁸..

Also retained was Mme. de Staël's concern with the positive aspects of the political -- moral leadership, civic education, etc. -- which, often unsuccessfully, she attempted to reconcile with her conception of liberty:

La sécurité politique, sans laquelle il ne peut pas avoir ni crédit ni capitaux accumulés, ne suffit pas encore pour développer toutes les ressources d'une nation.¹⁹

Like her treatment of the republic, Mme. de Staël's investigation of the English monarchy was indebted to Montesquieu's sociological categories and systemic vision. Indeed she expressly alerted her countrymen to the dangers of adopting a narrowly legalistic view of English institutions, affirming Montesquieu's point that a "liberal" constitution could operate successfully only in a compatible social setting:

Enfin, les Français veulent le renom et le bonheur attachés à la constitution anglaise, et cet essai vaut bien la peine d'être tenté; mais le système étant admis, il importe d'y conformer les discours, les institutions et les usages.²⁰

Although the term did not appear, Mme. de Staël was referring to Montesquieu's concept of "l'esprit général;" it was this distinctive national ethos -- a product of England's physical and moral circumstances -- that she sought to recreate on French soil. Implicit in her argument was the assumption that physical causes was the least influential category of determinants (i.e. England's peculiar geographical conditions could not, of course, be replicated in France). It is also clear from the above passage that she attributed

to constitutional arrangements a lesser significance than she assigned to the totality of other moral causes. Tocqueville's conceptual scheme for Democracy in America would be founded on identical assumptions.²¹ Finally Mme. de Staël did not apply Montesquieu's categories with analytical rigor; as in her treatment of the republic, she failed to define her concepts or organize her inquiry in systematic fashion.

As compared to Mme. de Staël's extensive treatment of constitutional arrangements in the republic, her discussion of the state apparatus in the English monarchy was curiously thin. She had not, to be sure, lowered her estimation of the importance of constitutional detail. Rather the superficiality of her treatment was probably grounded in the assumption that Necker had already provided the definitive account of English constitutional mechanics. Indeed most references to constitutional matters in the Considérations took the form of direct citations from Necker's works.

According to Mme. de Staël, the method and the range of lawmaking provided by the English constitution contributed to the maintenance of that nation's liberty. With regard to the protection of civil liberties (i.e. restrictions on the "range" of lawmaking), she revered the English constitution as a near perfect model. While Anglophobe critics offered evidence of arbitrary practices ranging from the impressment of seamen to religious persecution,²² Mme. de Staël either ignored their indictments or regarded such practices as exceptional and destined to be rectified.²³ In most areas -- speech, association, press, etc. -- the independence of the

citizen was scrupulously protected.

While it is clear that Mme. de Staël considered the decentralization of political power as an essential condition of liberty in England, her analysis of the English constitution remained superficial and ambiguous. When compared to sophisticated contemporaneous discussions by Guizot and Constant,²⁴ Mme. de Staël's weaknesses become all the more evident. Nowhere did she offer a systematic exposition of the various powers and functions of government and the interrelationships of its various branches. Like Montesquieu, she regarded the judicial power to be independent of the executive and legislative branches, and assigned it to the ad hoc institution of juries;²⁵ it was exercised according to due process of law, tempered by the natural benevolence of the judges²⁶ (this qualification was not present in Montesquieu's rigorously mechanistic approach to legal decision-making). The juridical function did not, however, figure in Mme. de Staël's tripartite division of governmental branches which comprised King, Lords and Commons. Her discussion of each left much unsaid. A direct citation from Necker nearly exhausted her treatment of the executive branch:

L'attribution pleine et entière du pouvoir exécutif au monarque, avec tous les moyens nécessaires pour l'exercer, afin d'assurer ainsi l'ordre public, afin d'empêcher que tous les pouvoirs rassemblés dans de Corps législatif n'introduisent un despotisme non moins oppresseur que tout autre.²⁷

The monarch was empowered to veto, but not to initiate legislation; his ministers and agents were responsible to Parliament. She acknowledged the emerging importance of the ca-

binet, without successfully integrating it into her theoretical framework. Commons alone had the right to fix expenditures and levy taxes.²⁸ It was composed of popularly elected representatives (despite Mme. de Staël's explicit use of the word "popular," she was acutely aware of the restricted nature of the English franchise)²⁹ and animated by the spirit of inquiry.³⁰ Mme. de Staël did not enumerate the powers of the House of Lords; earlier, she had ascribed to it the function of protecting the King from Commons.³¹ It embodied a principle of modified heredity, combining the majesty of birth with the recognition of ability and achievement:

La chambre des pairs en Angleterre est une magistrature patricienne, fondée sans doute sur les anciens souvenirs de la chevalerie, mais tout a fait associée à des institutions d'une nature très-différente. Un mérite distingué dans le commerce et surtout dans la jurisprudence en ouvre journellement l'entrée, et les droits représentatifs que les pairs exercent dans l'État attestent à la nation que c'est pour le bien public que leurs rangs sont institués.³²

Her view of relations between Lords and Commons followed Necker's departure from Montesquieu.³³ Whereas the earlier thinker had stressed the separate nature of the interests of Lords and Commons, Mme. de Staël and her father spoke in terms of a broad national interest to which the differing postures (active-passive) of Lords and Commons each contributed.

In sum, Mme. de Staël's profile of the English political system blurred a number of constitutional doctrines. Her focus of the tripartate division of Kings, Lords and Commons derived from the theory of balanced government as interpreted by Necker. Hence she cited her father's acknowledgement of the King's indirect role in the legislative pro-

cess:

Le monarque lui-même n'y participe qu'indirectement, et par la médiation des membres de la chambre et de la chambre des communes, qui sont en même temps ses ministres. ³⁴

Paradoxically this insight would later be developed by thinkers like Walter Bagehot to reject the balanced constitution in favor of a theory of parliamentary government, in which executive and legislative powers were fused in the cabinet. In other passages, Mme. de Staël appeared to come closer to the modern concept of the separation of powers, save for the fact that the judiciary did not figure in her formulation. She emphasized the need for separation between the executive and legislative branches,³⁵ and between the two branches of the legislature.³⁶ The decentralization of political power in England was further secured by an extensive system of local government.

Thus Mme. de Staël's analysis of the English constitution may be seen to have centered on its institutional safeguards against the abuse of power. She stressed its foundation in the rule of law and described the various constitutional mechanisms through which power was diffused and checked. As we have seen, Mme. de Staël coupled the demand for the strict delimitation of political power with the rise of modern commercial society of which England, like republican France, was a prototype. She argued that the motive of self-interest, at once stimulated and disciplined by commercial enterprise, entailed a valuation of the minimal state. Simultaneously, however, she tacitly conceded the insuffi-

ciency of an exclusively negative conception of the political and recognized the positive republican values of civic education, political participation and public spirit, as well as the political bonds of hierarchy and tradition inhering in aristocratic societies. These more ancient concerns had, nonetheless, to be reconciled with the demands of constitutionalism and justified by man's nature as devolved in the modern era. From this view, Mme. de Staël's ancient/modern dichotomy ascribed a deceptive simplicity to her position. While it conveyed her emphasis on the priority of constitutional restraint, it offered no indication of her efforts to adapt republican and aristocratic values to modern conditions. The full complexity of Mme. de Staël's position emerges in her examination of the extra-constitutional forces which fashioned the character of the English system.

Given her acute experience of French constitutional instability, it is hardly surprising that Mme. de Staël should devote considerable space to an inquiry into the bases of political legitimacy in England, an inquiry which she also used as a spring board to investigate the socio-political dynamics of the English nation. It was, for example, through a discussion of the party system that Mme. de Staël affirmed the consensual texture of British politics. Whereas French parties were rigidly split over the basic values of the political system, English parties divided over pragmatic issues and specific personalities:

Les torys, a-t-on dit, approuvent la liberté et aiment la monarchie, tandis que les whigs approuvent la monar-

chie et aiment la liberté; mais entre ces deux partis il ne saurait être question de la république ou de la royauté, de la dynastie ancienne ou nouvelle ... enfin des extrêmes et des contrastes, qu'on vu professer par les mêmes hommes en France ...³⁸

English party fidelity was contrasted to French party spirit; the former rooted in the discipline of honor,³⁹ the latter in fanaticism. This distinction made itself felt even in the mode of political discourse characteristic of each nation:

On ne recherche en aucune manière, dans la Chambre des communes d'Angleterre, le genre d'éloquence qui soulève la multitude (her allusion is to France) ... l'esprit d'affaires y preside, et l'on y est même plutôt trop sévère pour les mouvements oratoires ...⁴⁰

Mme. de Staël's stress on the fidelity of party members and the stability of party alignments distinguished her analysis from that of Montesquieu, which focused on the volatile interactions of the two English parties and the abruptly shifting loyalties of their members.

Turning to the theoretical grounds of English legitimacy, Mme. de Staël first examined the role of tradition as it related to the authority of the hereditary monarch and the aristocratic upper chamber. She emphasized that English traditionalism was consistent with the presence of constitutional safeguards and representative government:

Nulle part l'hérédité n'est plus solidement établie qu'en Angleterre, bien que le peuple anglais ait rejeté la légitimité fondée sur le droit divin, pour y substituer l'hérédité consacrée par le gouvernement représentatif ...⁴¹

This point Mme. de Staël drove home against French reactionaries whom, she contended, invoked the claims of tradition to sanctify an absolutist monarchy. In passages reminiscent of

Thomas Paine, she insisted that tradition was not a principle to be defended blindly:

Il serait curieux de savoir à laquelle des générations de nos pères l'infailibilité a été accordée? Quel est ce temps passé qui doit servir de modèle au temps actuel, et dont on ne peut se départir d'une ligne sans tomber dans les innovations pernicieuses? ⁴²

When accepted within the context of constitutional restraints, however, tradition could be justified as a grounds of political legitimacy. From the standpoint of negative liberty, tradition operated as a supplemental non-legal restraint on the behavior of the political elite:

Ils ont d'ordinaire des talents moins remarquables, mais leurs disposition est plus pacifique (the distinction here is between hereditary and parvenu princes); ils ont plus de préjugés, mais moins d'ambition; ils sont moins étonnés du pouvoir, puisque, dès leur enfance, on a leur dit qu'ils y étaient destinés ... ⁴³

Viewed as a positive force, tradition served to mould character, instill habits of respect and cement patriotic ties. ⁴⁴ It inspired the piecemeal character of political change in England which, in turn, sustained the bonds of history and nourished a devotion to ancient values:

... ce qui caractérise surtout le gouvernement anglais c'est la possibilité de se perfectionner sans secousse. Il reste en Angleterre des formes anciennes, remontant au temps féodal ... la constitution s'est établie en greffant le nouveau sur l'ancienne ... ⁴⁵

Tradition channeled to beneficial ends those non-rational drives which were inexorably a part of man's makeup; only the military leader who captured the imagination by extravagant exploits could inspire a similar degree of attachment:

Or la gloire propre à inspirer le respect que les hommes accordent volontairement à une ancienne prééminence ne

saurait être acquise que par des exploits militaires; et on sait quel caractère les grands capitaines, les conquérants, portent presque toujours dans les affaires civiles. ⁴⁶

To incorporate the principle of tradition, Mme. de Staël had envisaged for France institutions analogous to the English monarchy and Chamber of Peers to be filled, respectively, by Louis XVIII and the French nobility of ancient lineage. The sanction of tradition could not, she stressed, be extended to parvenu aristocrats -- those with titles purchased under the Old Regime or rewarded with noble rank by Napoleon. ⁴⁷

A second basis of English legitimacy stemmed from the Englishman's conviction that his society was just, or worthy of rational consent. Among the values sanctioned by reason were constitutionalism, representative government, civil liberty and meritocracy. As a republican Mme. de Staël had appealed to these values to repudiate the claims of tradition, but in a major shift in strategy she now openly maintained that reason and tradition were mutually supportive. This theme was revealed in her examination of the functional role of tradition within the monarchy and, as we shall see, epitomized in her discussion of the English aristocracy.

The distinguishing feature of the English aristocracy was its openness to recruitment from other social strata. The criterion of admission was merit, as defined by exceptional public service. This arrangement sharply contrasted with the closed, exclusively ascriptive nature of the aristocracy in France. Whereas the French aristocracy stultified by losing contact with the interests of the nation, the Eng-

lish aristocracy, periodically renewed and rejuvenated by the infusion of new members, remained responsive to the needs of the population.⁴⁸ Thus together with the symbolic value of the nobility's ancient heritage was fused its functional contribution of public service. This judicious mating of merit and tradition in the English nobility had earlier attracted the attention of Voltaire and Montesquieu. The latter wrote:

... les plus grands, dans ce pays de liberté, s'approch-
eraient plus du peuple; les rangs seraient donc plus
séparés, et les personnes plus confondues ... On n'y
estimerait guère les hommes pas des talents ou des at-
tributs frivoles, mais par des qualités réelles; et de
ce genre il n'y a que deux: les richesses et le mérite
personnel ...⁴⁹

A century later, Tocqueville's celebrated distinction between the French "caste system" and the English aristocracy would display a similar perspective.⁵⁰

If the Chamber of Peers combined merit with ascription, merit alone served as the criterion of public office in England. While Mme. de Staël acknowledged distortions of this principle arising from the existence of rotten boroughs, she did not linger for long on the topic.⁵¹ Instead her discussion of the electoral process remained abstract, focusing on merit as the criterion of political rewards. She stressed the rationality of this arrangement which recognized natural inequalities of ability yet fostered the self-improvement of all:

Cet ordre politique encourage toutes les facultés de
chacun, parce qu'il n'y a point de bornes aux avantages
que la richesse et le talent peuvent valoir, et qu'au-
cun exclusion n'interdit ni les alliances, ni les em-
plois, ni la société, ni les titres, au dernier des
citoyens anglais, s'il est digne d'être le premier.⁵²

From this view, political office (contrary to the arguments of certain contemporary students of classical liberalism)⁵³ was to be neither deprecated nor suffered, but rather considered as one of many social rewards to be actively sought. While public office could be attained only by those relatively few persons with outstanding qualifications, hope of its gain served to inspire the efforts of even the most humbly endowed.

By means of this argument, Mme. de Staël introduced through the back door certain "positive" or "republican" principles of government seemingly excluded by her egalitarian and often narrowly constitutionalist framework. As she had done in her earlier model of republican France, Mme. de Staël set out to reconcile the values of civic virtue, political education and participation with those character traits she regarded as natural to modern man, namely self-interest and sympathy. The latter trait was not inherently opposed to the pursuit of common purposes or social goals; it was, in fact, precisely this instinct which united man with his fellows and allowed for the extension of self requisite for the bestowal of esteem or the practice of emulation. Rather it was the motive of self-interest which, on its face, appeared incompatible with a concern for community values, and hence required a theoretical reconciliation with the concept of the common good. We have already encountered Mme. de Staël's solution to this problem in her Thermidorian republic -- her argument that man's desire for distinction and esteem functioned to instill moral disci-

pline as well as channel his efforts toward the pursuit of the common good. In the Considérations, she applied the same insight to explain the mechanics of the English socio-political order. As in her republic, the gratification of man's higher forms of self-interest -- the desire for approval, esteem, glory -- required the presence of institutions that functioned to cultivate the political awareness and activity of the nation. For in order to reap the rewards of esteem ("La considération publique en Angleterre est le premier but des hommes en pouvoir"),⁵⁴ the elite had to make known its deeds; its actions had to be open to public scrutiny:

La publicité dans les affaires est un principe si généralement admis, que, bien que les Anglais soient par nature les hommes les plus réservés et ceux qui ont le plus répugnance à parler en société, il y a presque toujours, dans les salles ou les comités rassemblent, des places pour les spectateurs, et une estrade d'où les orateurs s'adressent à l'assemblée...⁵⁵

The principle of publicity accounted, in turn, for the high valuation of certain political and semi-political institutions: public debates, citizen's committees, frequent elections and a free press. These institutions, essential for enhancing the reputation of the most worthy, functioned simultaneously as agencies of civic and moral education by instilling a sense of public spirit and setting before the nation models of excellence to be emulated. Within this context, public opinion operated in its positive sense, serving as a vehicle of development for both the rulers and the ruled:

Ces respectables assemblées n'ont pas uniquement pour but d'encourager les œuvres de bienfaisance...⁵⁶ il en est qui servent surtout à consolider l'union entre les grands seigneurs et les commerçants, entre la nation et le gouvernement; et celles-là sont les plus solennelles ...⁵⁷

While Mme. de Staël had not earlier stressed the role of local government in promoting a synthesis of self-interest and civic virtue, she now singled out for praise England's decentralized system of political administration:

En Angleterre ... les institutions favorisent tous les genres de progrès intellectuels. Les jurés, les administrations de provinces et de villes, les élections, les journaux, donnent à la nation entière une grande part d'intérêt dans la chose publique...⁵⁸ On se garde bien en Angleterre de tout concentrer dans l'autorité ministérielle, et l'on veut que, dans chaque province, dans chaque ville, les intérêts de localité soient remis entre les mains d'hommes choisis par le peuple pour les diriger ...⁵⁹ Toutes les classes d'hommes bien élevés se réunissent souvent en Angleterre dans les comités divers ou l'on s'occupe de telle ou telle entreprise ...⁶⁰

The passage offers a striking anticipation of Tocqueville, who also valued local government as a prime agency of political education. Indeed the two thinkers had set for themselves the identical task of adapting civic humanist ideals to the conditions of modern commercial society.⁶¹ In certain instances, their strategies were remarkably similar (i.e. the attempt to find equivalent modern forms for civic virtue in religion, commercial prudence, etc.). Unlike Tocqueville, however, Mme. de Staël developed an elitist version of civic humanism (Tocqueville's closest approximation of this was his treatment of the lawyer's role in the democracy) in which emulation and approbation provided the psychological mainsprings. Thus whereas Toc-

queville extolled the benefits of the general participation of citizens in self-government, Mme. de Staël viewed local government as a more proximate arena for exposure to a virtuous elite. This is not to suggest that she minimized the importance of general participation in political decision-making (with the exclusion of the non-propertied), but only that by stressing its emulative aspects her emphasis differed from Tocqueville's.

Finally it must be stressed that, to Mme. de Staël's mind, the political circumstances outlined above not only performed an educative function, but also served to protect individual rights and maximum areas of privacy. Not content with a purely legalistic conception of modern liberty, Mme. de Staël inquired into the value's socio-political requisites, arguing that political enlightenment and participation were its essential guarantees. Thus Mme. de Staël often examined the same institution from two distinct angles of vision: the cultivation of community and the protection of privacy. From the latter perspective, publicity (a free and inquiring press, etc.) operated to uncover despotic machinations which public opinion, in turn, condemned; similarly, political decentralization placed itself in the service of jealously guarded local interests:

... le respect pour la liberté individuelle s'étend à l'exercice de facultés de chacun, et la nation est si jalouse de s'administrer elle-même, quand cela se peut, qu'à beaucoup d'égards on manque à Londres de la police nécessaire à l'agrément de la ville, parce que les ministres ne peuvent pas empiéter sur les autorités locales ...⁶²

The reconciliation of public and private goods which characterized English political life was, according to Mme. de Staël, supported and sustained by a congruent social order. Thus she explained:

... quand les institutions sociales sont combinées de manière qu les intérêts particuliers et les vertus publiques soient d'accord, il ne s'ensuit pas que ces vertus n'aient autre base que l'intérêt personnel; seulement elles sont plus répandues parcequ'elles sont avantageuses, aussi bien qu'honorables ...⁶³

Mme. de Staël's discussion of English society was indebted to Montesquieu's theory of moral causes, although her categories of investigation were never as clearly defined as those of her master. The relevant chapter headings -- "De la société en Angleterre et de ses rapports avec l'ordre social" and "Des lumières, de la religion et de la morale" -- concealed the complexity of her analysis. Under the first heading, Mme. de Staël offered a profile of social stratification, customs, domestic institutions, economic attitudes and national character; under the second, she examined, in addition to the role of religion, the various aspects of English intellectual activity.

Like Montesquieu, who used the seraglio to portray the unique character of despotic rule, Mme. de Staël portrayed English domestic society to symbolize the reconciliation of civic and libertarian principles that distinguished the English nation. She had earlier, it will be recalled, cited the progressive enrichment of domestic life as a key factor in the historical evolution of the demand for privacy. She again drew upon this theme in the

Considerations, metaphorically equating the isolated domesticity of the English with a resistance to the encroachment of the political:

... le chez soi est le goût dominant des Anglais, et peut être ce penchant a-t-il contribué à leur faire détester le système politique qui permet ailleurs d'exiler ou d'arrêter arbitrairement. Chaque ménage a sa demeure séparée, et Londres est composé d'un grand nombre de petites maisons fermées comme des boîtes, et où n'est guère plus facile de pénétrer.⁶⁴

As before, she spoke of the cultivation of natural virtue as the consequence of this self-contained domesticity:

... on ne trouve que de bons ménages, des vertus privées, une vie intérieure entièrement consacrée à l'éducation d'une nombreuse famille qui, nourrie dans la conviction intime de la sainteté du mariage, ne se permettrait pas une pensée légère à cet égard.⁶⁵

English family life was thus regular, highly valued, and eminently rational; such deplored French institutions as arranged marriages and convent educations were rarely encountered.⁶⁶ If Mme. de Staël depicted the English family as an island apart from civic life, she simultaneously regarded it as an essential support of the political order. The absence of social coquetry found its equivalent in the candid character of English politics.⁶⁷ And in certain instances, public benefits derived directly from private virtues:

Dans le pays de la plus grande publicité, les secrets de l'État sont mieux gardés que nulle part ailleurs... dans un pays où les mœurs domestiques sont si régulières, les hommes mariés n'ont point de maîtresses; et il n'y a que les maîtresses qui sachent les secrets, et surtout qui les révèlent.⁶⁸

Among the earliest to investigate what a modern

critic has termed the "sociology of leisure," Mme. de Staël drew attention to the solitary nature of English pastimes:

... en Angleterre ... il arrive ... d'aimer mieux le délassement physique, les promenades, la campagne, enfin tout la plaisir où l'esprit se repose, que la conversation dans laquelle il faut penser et parler avec autant de soin que dans les affaires les plus sérieuses...⁶⁹

Her analysis was again doubly focused on the English valuation of privacy ("... il ne leur conviendrait que leurs femmes se fissent, comme en France, une famille de choix d'un certain nombre de personnes constamment réunies")⁷⁰ and civic involvement (i.e. the need for repose in preparation for public responsibility).

Turning to examine the anatomy of English society, Mme. de Staël observed a differentiated, yet highly mobile, class structure; the English system opportunities to all of its citizens to improve their station.⁷¹ Social custom did not, as in France, exert an significant influence on conduct: English shyness and timidity inhibited the familiarity required for the cultivation of close social ties. As a consequence, social gatherings took second place to both domestic life and public duties.⁷² Individualism in taste and styles of life flourished:

... il n'est point de nation où l'on trouve autant d'exemples de ce qu'on appelle l'excentricité, d'est-à-dire une manière d'être tout à fait original, et qui ne compte pour rien l'opinion d'autrui.⁷³

Although English tolerance of individual self-expression faltered in the case of women. Mme. de Staël pursued this

theme more vigorously in the Corinne where she cruelly depicted the English woman's total absorption in the petty details of domestic life. Her indictment was less harsh in the Considérations, with her emphasis falling on the positive virtues of domesticity.

The individualism of the English was, Mme. de Staël observed, balanced by their disposition to participate in voluntary associations for public and charitable purposes.⁷⁴ This disposition cut across all classes of society, and their mutual involvement served both to strengthen community bonds and delimit the province of the state. In the context of American society, Tocqueville would encounter a similar conjunction of individualist and communitarian tendencies, allowing him to preserve, adapt and refine the insights offered by Mme. de Staël.

Economic circumstances also nourished the dual strands of individualism and community in England. A commercial and industrial society, England was characterized by a competitive spirit, highly mobile wealth and general prosperity. A devotion to commercial enterprise bridged all social classes from the nobility, who thus retained their social utility, to the masses, who sought to improve their station. The foundation of the English economy was material prosperity -- a ground equidistant from the austerity of the classical republic and the luxury of the monarchy. Montesquieu had contended that "les besoins réels" formed the basis of England's economy; Mme. de Staël offered a similar observa-

tion, interpreting England's prosperité as its ability to provide decent living standards and encourage economic growth. Sometimes, however, she attributed the term the more sinister meaning of "comfort," a debilitating state of material well-being (though not extravagance) founded on a narrow conception of self-interest:

Il y a de l'egoïsme dans les habitudes, et quelquefois dans le caractère. La richesse et les goûts qu'elle donne en sont la cause: on ne veut se déranger en rien, tant on peut se bien arranger en tout ... 75

Thus Mme. de Staël recognized the potential for social atomization harbored by commercial society, yet she also recognized certain countervailing tendencies generated by the same source. Like Montesquieu and Tocqueville,⁷⁶ she regarded the practice of self-discipline to be essential to the spirit of commerce. And she called attention to the moral and intellectual benefits to be derived from the commercial order:

La commerce, mettant les hommes en relation avec les intérêts du monde, étend les idées, exerce le jugement, et faire sentir sans cesse, par la multiplicité et de la diversité des transactions, la nécessité de la justice. 77

Mme. de Staël's defense of England's National Debt is of particular interest against the background of civic humanist thought examined in the preceding section. We have seen that civic humanist critics of the Debt like Bolingbroke had assailed it as a threat to the independence of its creditors and a resource of despotic power. Given Mme. de Staël's civic humanist leanings, it would seem to follow that she, too, shared this view. Even from an op-

posing perspective -- her valuation of privacy -- a critical attitude toward the Debt is anticipated. Mme. de Staël, however, overturned these expectations by ingeniously reconciling the Debt with the dictates of both civic virtue and modern liberty. She argued that a huge public debt attested to a prosperous economy (i.e. a flourishing "private" sector) as well as a high degree of confidence in the political order. The Debt encouraged citizen creditors to identify their individual interests with the broad interests of the collectivity. It ensured the careful scrutiny of governmental operations, thus fostering a general concern for public affairs while serving as a guarantee against despotism ("Les capitalistes qui prêtent leur argent sont les hommes du monde qu'il est le plus difficile de tromper").⁷⁸

As in her Thermidorian republic, Mme. de Staël discussed religion in England in terms of its functional utility as a moralizing force that diminished the necessary role of the state. The predominant religious sect was Protestantism which, according to Mme. de Staël, encouraged enlightenment and nourished a spirit of independence. Moreover she noted that the English clergy, unlike the French, never exceeded its proper bounds by attaching itself to worldly power. Its political activities were judiciously subordinated to the interests of the ministry.⁷⁹ It played no role in public education.

Of those forces which may be considered intellectual, Mme. de Staël turned her attention to education and

literature. Her remarks on the character of English education were general in nature: the intellectual standards of the nation were high; there existed a vast network of public and private educational institutions, with special programs developed to "mettre l'instruction à la portée de l'indigence."⁸⁰ Initiatives for self-improvement were provided by a social structure geared to reward talent or industry. English statesmen, unlike their French counterparts, combined political ability with high academic achievement, as evidenced by Fox's treatises on Greek and Windham's contributions in mathematics and literature.⁸¹

Because of the extreme brevity of Mme. de Staël's examination of English literature in the Considérations, it is necessary to draw on her earlier works for a more adequate presentation of her views. In all her writings, Mme. de Staël stressed the practical character of English intellectual endeavors which she related to the presence of free institutions: specifically, a free press and the liberty to participate in public life. Censorship, she argued, bred a licentious or precious form of literary escapism, while political inexperience feuled utopian speculation. Supported by free institutions, utilitarianism was the dominant school of philosophy in England. Prose writing tended to the banal and mundane. Certain literary genres -- memoirs, confessions, and autobiographies -- were left uncultivated in a nation more attuned to the greatness of "ideas" than of "men." However England can be credited

with the development of the novel, a genre dealing primarily in domestic situations and thus reflecting the English taste for privacy. By contrast, the English did not excel in the comic arts. English "humor" was distinguishable from French "wit:" the latter, having pleasure as its sole purpose; the former, touched with sadness, expressing a philosophical or moral idea. English poetry also conveyed a mood of melancholy, inspired by sober reflexion on the seriousness of the liberal enterprise:

On se demand pourquoi les Anglois qui sont heureux par leur gouvernement et par leurs moeurs, ont une imagination beaucoup plus melancholique que ne l'étoit celle des François? C'est que la liberté et la vertu, ces deux grands résultats de la raison humaine, exigent de la méditation; et la méditation conduit necessairement à des objets sérieux. ⁸⁴

The example of England, as Pierre Reboul has painstakingly demonstrated in his massive study,⁸⁵ played a considerable role in the French political debate under the Restoration. The vitality of the English model had, in fact, continued nearly uninterrupted since the Huguenots had enlisted it to condemn French despotism following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. It gained further popularity through the writings of Montesquieu. Thus the image of England fashioned by Mme. de Staël in Part IV of the Considerations had deep historical roots, although I join in Reboul's assessment that it was Mme. de Staël's own profile of England that most immediately informed Restoration perspectives. Her homage to the practical reason, public spirit and private sensibilities of the English

bourgeoisie -- as well as her emphasis on thier assimilia-
 tion into the aristocracy (as De Ruggiero notes, the French
 bourgeoisie "did not want to be a new class; it now wanted
 to s'ennoblir")⁸⁶-- served the interests of liberal apolo-
 gists of the middle class like Guizot, whose detailed
 studies of English political history and institutions earned
 him the title "Anglomanic." Even aristocratic opponents
 like Chateaubriand who scorned England's "politique mercan-
 tile," warmly embraced Mme. de Staël's characterization of
 the English peerage as stable, respected and meritorious.

Yet for all her ardent tributes to England, Mme. de
 Staël's assessment of the nation was not entirely uncritical.
 Certainly Reboul, depicting her as the most anglomane of com-
 mentators, exaggerates the degree of her enchantment. If
 she blunted her criticisms, she nevertheless admitted abuses
 in the English system. In a chapter with the sinister title,
 "Les Anglais ne perdront-ils pas un jour leur liberté?", she
 she chastened the English for ill-conceived policies in In-
 dia and Ireland, and elsewhere acknowledged the need for
 Parliamentary reform. A glaring critical omission, how-
 ever, was Mme. de Staël's failure to recognize the dismal
 condition of the English workingclass. The realities of the
 English working poor ill-suited her vision of England as a
 nation of universal prosperity and challenged her ideologi-
 cal sensibilities. Even Benjamin Constant had, by 1816,
 come to a more sober awareness of England's social evils.⁸⁷
 Though it remained for Sismondî, Mme. de Staël's erstwhile

protégé, to expose the misery of the workers by calling into question the very bases of English commercial prosperity:

Quels sont donc les fruits de cette immense richesse accumulée? N'ont-ils pas eu d'autre effet que de faire partager les soucis, les privations, le danger d'une ruine complète à toutes les classes? L'Angleterre, en oubliant l'homme pour les choses, n'a-t-elle sacrifié la fin aux moyens? ⁸⁸

* * * *

Taken together, the models of the Thermidorian republic and English monarchy represent Mme. de Staël's ideal of post-revolutionary free society. Although certain fundamental arrangements were analagous, each model nonetheless exhibits certain distinctive attributes. While hereditary institutions were excluded from the republic, they figured prominently in the English model. Mme. de Staël's utopian expectations of the republican technocratic elite were moderated as she turned to praise the utilitarian character of English philosophy.

From a critical perspective, both models betray similar weaknesses. With regard to Mme. de Staël's method, two major problems are encountered. The first relates to her refusal to define clearly concepts central to her argument. I have carefully charted the various meanings she ascribed to the terms "property" and "public opinion." Even her pivotal concept of "liberty" encompassed logically distinct notions of privacy and individual autonomy. A second set of problems relates to Mme. de Staël's conceptual apparatus. Following Montesquieu's lead, she assigned to her

political models a distinctive psychological mainspring, or principle. But whereas Montesquieu had ostensibly attributed only one principle per governmental type, Mme. de Staël, under the category of "human nature," incorporated a wide variety of motives. (A careful reader of Montesquieu could identify similar tensions in his own analysis, especially in his model of England.) She failed, moreover, to define the nature of the interrelations of virtue, self-interest and higher self-interest. Nor did Mme. de Staël perform the necessary theoretical adjustments as she variously enlisted discrepant units of analysis: the individual, the class and the mass. I have also examined the inconsistencies concealed by her public/private dichotomy. These problems of method cannot be divorced from logical inconsistencies in Mme. de Staël's theoretical perspective.

Most prominent was the tension between her positive and negative orientations towards the political. Other related tensions may be summarized as the priority of liberty vs the priority of social and civic education; the value of socio-political conflict vs the creation of a homogenous political culture; political participation vs elitist dirigisme; the telos of public happiness vs the inevitability of melancholy. Mme. de Staël either ignored these tensions or thought to have transcended them by her ingeniously dualistic conceptions of such institutions as the National Debt (simultaneously a guarantee against despotic government and a stimulus to civic enlightenment), the domestic

household (nourishing a demand for privacy while supplying standards of political judgment), or the hereditary monarchy (tradition serving both as a restraint on the Crown and as a mainspring of national patriotism). And like Montesquieu before her and Tocqueville after, she investigated how self-interest functioned to promote the common good, and how other forms of restraint (religious, cultural, commercial) served as modern equivalents of civic virtue. In the final analysis, however, despite her prodigious efforts, Mme. de Staël never satisfactorily reconciled the disparate sets of goods she sought to incorporate within the framework of a free society.

As with her theory of historical progress, the vitality of Mme. de Staël's legacy was enhanced by the eclectic quality of her arguments. Precisely this aspect of her thought appealed to nineteenth century romantic liberals like Lamartine, "Her genius was like an antique chorus, in which all the great voices of the drama unite in one tumultuous concord,"⁸⁹ while positivist technocrats like St. Simon could similarly rank her a precursor. Mme. de Staël's efforts most directly informed the perspectives of Restoration liberalism: her efforts to steer a middle course between radicalism and reaction, and to mediate the interests of the aristocracy and the middle class anticipated the juste milieu ideology of Guizot and his colleagues. Specific aspects of her legacy to the Doctrinaires have been noted within the course of this chapter. From a broader view, Mme. de Staël's models bridged the theoretical enter-

prises of two key architects of French liberalism -- Montesquieu and Tocqueville. Like Tocqueville, she adapted and expanded Montesquieu's conceptual apparatus to suit the circumstances of her own day. Dear to all three thinkers was the same set of values: liberty, civic virtue and individualism. Their overlapping yet distinctive attempts to reconcile those goods make up a prominent chapter in the history of liberalism.

Significantly, many twentieth century critics of the liberal tradition have conveniently ignored its historical complexities to frame indictments based on crude oversimplifications of its tenets. Sheldon Wolin's interpretation typifies this approach. I quote from his prefatory remarks to the chapter on "Liberalism" in Politics and Vision:

We shall try to show ... how gradually society came to be conceived simultaneously as an entity distinct from political arrangements and the shorthand symbol for all worthwhile human endeavor; how these developments left little scope and less prestige for the political. The political became identified with a narrow set of institutions labelled 'government,' the harsh symbol of coercion necessary to sustain orderly social transactions ... ⁹⁰

The applicability of this thesis, he claims, extends to "Locke, the classical economists, the French liberals, and the English utilitarians."⁹¹ John Schaar's perspective is consistent with Wolin's:

The public realm is not seen as the place where great men naturally gather and where great actions most naturally take place. Rather, the political arena, being itself a place of second rate action is the place where second rate men gather to pursue the second rate ends.⁹²

C.B. Macpherson singles out "possessive individualism" as

the distinctive concept of human nature underpinning the liberal tradition:

... the individual was essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as a part of a larger social whole, but as owner of himself ...⁹³

Arguing along similar lines, R.P. Wolff reproaches liberalism for its failure to recognize the values of community.⁹⁴ In fairness to these thinkers, none, with the exception of Wolin, explicitly referred to the French liberal tradition. Nonetheless all have perceived liberalism as a more or less homogenous theoretical entity characterized by the above traits. And like Wolin, they would presumably not look beyond Mme. de Staël's ancient/modern dichotomy which indeed neatly substantiates their contentions. Even sensitive interpreters like Ephraim Harpaz⁹⁵ have over-emphasized this dichotomy to the neglect of manifold complexities of French liberalism. By illuminating the varied dimensions of this intellectual tradition -- as exemplified by the writings of Mme. de Staël -- we simultaneously call into question the narrower perspectives of its twentieth century interpreters.

First we have seen that any reductionist characterization of the theory of human nature, such as Macpherson's "possessive individualism," is inconsistent with Mme. de Staël's complex treatment of the subject. While the theory of possessive individualism (or any similar analysis stressing the primacy of man's self-regarding motives) illuminates an important area of her thought, it glosses over a key dis-

inction between "higher" and "lower" forms of self-interest and ignores completely the disinterested motive of "sympathy." To be sure, this complicated theoretical scaffolding accounted for curious turns in Mme. de Stael's analysis: the timid, materialistic English who required privacy and a minimal state were also the publicity seeking English who thrived on civic involvement. Yet such logical incoherencies may be avoided only at the cost of distorting Mme. de Staël's position.

A second set of charges relates to liberalism's alleged devaluation of the political; its failure to provide for the positive potential of citizenship. Proponents of this view may well cite Mme. de Staël's frequent allusions to government as a coercive regulatory power, or her celebration of modern liberty. A more careful reading of her works, however, discloses the civic humanist dimensions of her thought. Her valuation of political office as the highest of social rewards, her stress on the exemplary deportment of the statesman, her view of the vote as an instrument of self-improvement hardly conforms to a conceptual scheme which envisages the political as an arena of "second rate action" and leaves no place for the self-conscious pursuit of common ends. Her thought contains precedents for Schumpeter's view that political life is severely diminished within the framework of large-scale democracies (this was precisely the point of her ancient/modern dichotomy), while it simultaneously offers an antici-

pation of Tocqueville's rival efforts to preserve man's capacity for citizenship by means of decentralized political arrangements. To complicate matters further, Mme. de Staël's emulative concept of participation suggested that if direct personal participation in government was no longer a possibility, the masses might still derive benefits from an on-going empathy with their elected representatives. Large scale democracy thus need not, as Schumpeter argues, entail a lessening of civic awareness. In sum, the attempt to refine Mme. de Stael's position -- or the positions of those whose intellectual traditions she shared -- to conform to a narrow ideological framework is ill-founded. We have seen, instead, that her brand of liberalism took shape around a variety of intellectual and political ambivalences; that it contained and attempted to synthesize a set of widely disparate political values, among which liberty ranked as a primary good.

DESPOTISM

Mme. de Staël's concept of despotism, formulated to describe the character of Napoleonic rule in Part IV of the Considérations, served purposes both theoretical and polemical. From a theoretical perspective, Mme. de Staël enlisted it as a classificatory construct defining a set of socio-political arrangements antithetical to those she alleged to be liberal.¹ The concept thus embodied a moral critique, as well as performing the analytical function of illuminating, by way of contrast, the model of a free political society exemplified by her Thermidorian republic or English monarchy. The normative character of the term bridged its use as a classificatory construct and political weapon. In the latter capacity, the concept of despotism figured in the polemics of French liberals seeking to discredit the Terror and Bonapartism. As interpreted by Mme. de Staël, it referred both to an archaic and stagnant form of rule and to an historically unique mode of domination unprecedented in its methods and its horror. Because this contradiction is explained by the exigencies of her political position under the Restoration, I shall first turn to consider the political context of her writing. I shall then examine Mme. de Staël's concept as an analytical construct, viewing it as an advance over Montesquieu's model and an anticipation of contemporary theories of totalitarianism.

* * * *

Throughout its history, the concept of despotism has been closely linked to the concerns of practical politics. I have earlier remarked on the use of the term by the seventeenth century aristocratic and Protestant opponents of royal centralization, and how their formulations formed Montesquieu's own treatment of the concept. Largely as a consequence of Montesquieu's writings, the concept of despotism assumed prominence in the eighteenth century political debate. Generally it was invoked as a term of censure, although proponents of the thèse royale like Voltaire² endeavored to repair its image. The concept was only fully redeemed under the Terror, having been adapted by leaders like Robespierre and Marat to denote a system of revolutionary regenerative terror. The concept's pejorative connotations were revived by French liberals like Mme. de Staël who contended that the Terror's claim to be a "despotism of liberty" was a patent contradiction in terms. Thus the liberals recovered the thread of Montesquieu to condemn the Terror and Bonapartism-- phases of the Revolution whose affinities they were prone to overstate-- as "despotic", or incompatible with liberty.

The reasons for Mme. de Staël's attraction to the concept of despotism fail, however, to account for the two contradictory (though similarly pejorative) interpretations of the concept found in her writings. In the Considérations, despotism was, first, broadly construed as all historical forms of rule characterized by an absence of liberty or the abuse of political power; second, it was meant to suggest a

qualitatively new and dynamic form of domination exercised by Napoleon and embodied in the apparatus of the Terror. To explain this inconsistency in her usage, it is necessary to refer to the political context of the Considérations, and specifically to the charges levelled by Mme. de Staël's principal opponents under the Restoration -- the reactionary aristocracy, who stigmatized the liberals as authors of a demonic revolution that represented an unparalleled and indiscriminate assault on French tradition. To undercut this indictment, the liberals had, in effect, to dispute their opponents interpretation of the Revolution. (I am indebted to Stanley Mellon,³ with whom I have elsewhere disagreed, for these broad outlines of the Liberal strategy.) Against the claim that the Revolution was a single uniformly damnable experience from the philosophes to Bonaparte, the liberals submitted that the Revolution consisted of a number of distinct phases, and that the accomplishments of the Constituent Assembly (1789-1791) could be logically separated from the aberrations of the Terror and Napoleon. Against the claim that the liberals were uniquely responsible for all revolutionary crimes, the liberals maintained that the reactionaries were themselves implicated. And to counter the allegation that the Revolution represented the unprecedented break in the pattern of French history (indeed de Maistre found an equivalent only in the Satanic revolt against Heaven), the liberals sought to demonstrate that the Revolution was thoroughly consistent with French tradition. It was within the context of these strategies that Mme. de Staël made effective use of the concept of

despotism.

First, she used the term to refute her opponents' idyllic portrait of French history prior to 1789. Specifically, Mme, de Staël argued that rather than being the unique product of the Revolution, despotism was a more or less permanent feature of the French past. Hence the Revolution could not be seen as an aberrant phenomenon, but only as the most recent example of an age old struggle against despotic rule:

Mais le désordre dans l'ordre, le despotisme, s'est constamment maintenu...et toutes les pages de notre histoire sont ensanglantées...⁴ Les hommes ne savent guère que l'histoire de son temps; et l'on dirait, en lisant les déclamations de nos jours, que les huit siècles de la monarchie qui ont précédé la révolution française n'ont été que des temps tranquilles, et que la nation était alors sur des roses. On oublie les templiers brûlés sous Philippe le Bel...la guerre de la Jacquerie; les assassinats du duc d'Orléans et du duc de Bourgogne...⁵

When Mme. de Staël spoke of despotism in these instances, it is without specific content, being roughly equivalent to "oppression" or "crime". By this interpretation of French history, she attempted both to undermine her opponents' veneration of their past and to provide the liberal cause with historical roots of its own.

Mme. de Staël's response to her second task-- the isolation of Bonaparte and the Terror as betrayals of the "true" Revolution-- was to enlist again the concept of despotism. Now, however, the term was taken to mean a form of domination historically unique and unprecedented in its horror. Instead of arguing as she had done previously,

that the excesses of the Revolution were paralleled by the atrocities of the Old Regime, Mme. de Staël shifted her strategy to defeat the conservatives on their own territory. Granting her opponents their trump card-- that the outrages of the Revolution were without precedent (hence her reformulation of the concept of despotism)-- Mme. de Staël proceeded to outdistance them in expressions of moral indignation. How could the liberals be responsible for the crimes of the Revolution she demanded, when they themselves were its principal victims? Offering a detailed account of her hardships under the Terror and her persecution by Napoleon, Mme. de Staël refused to grant the conservatives a monopoly of suffering. Those responsible for the Revolution of 1789, the "friends of liberty" as she characterized them, were overwhelmed by the ensuing rush of events; the first phase of the Revolution had to be distinguished from its subsequent aberrations.

It was then, to isolate and condemn the "criminal" phases of the Revolution that Mme. de Staël constructed her second model of despotism. The Terror and the Bonapartist regime were unique, she reasoned, because they were peculiar to an advanced stage of civilization exhibiting unprecedented social conditions and technological resources. The restraints which functioned to moderate earlier forms of domination -- custom, religious belief, ascribed status -- were no longer operative. During the course of the Revolution, French society had become increasingly egalitarian, fragmented and rootless. Within this context, the vehicles

of historical progress-- the scientific method, the printing press, the spread of education, the cultivation of public opinion-- were transformed into instruments of a hitherto unknown form of domination: the scientific method, taking the "mass" as its unit of analysis, was readily applicable to large scale projects of social engineering; the wide dissemination of printed materials, the expansion of educational facilities, the newly emergent attentiveness to public affairs was exploitable by an advanced and novel form of rule founded on indoctrination and mobilized consensus. The uniquely modern combination of a "mass society" and vehicles of mass mobilization thus issued in a form of despotism that was qualitatively distinct from the static or limited variety of previous experience.

Mme. de Staël turned to the concept of "modernity" not only to identify those traits which accounted for the distinctiveness of the Napoleonic despotism (her analysis of the Terror was shallow), but also as an instrument of criticism. Unlike the reactionaries who expressed their contempt of the Revolution in rhetorical flourishes about Satanic revolts, Mme. de Staël framed her own indictment in terms suggested by the Enlightenment, i.e. she appealed to the theory of historical progress. As we have seen, she interpreted history as a process of advancement toward the universal realization of her prototypical Thermidorian or English model, distinguished by liberal constitutionalist arrangements, an open class structure, and a commercial economy. Against this vision, the Napoleonic regime repre-

sented to Mme. de Staël the negation of all that was modern:

On a comparé Bonaparte à Charlemagne, et l'on pourrait le mettre au contraire en opposition avec lui; car l'un était de beaucoup en avant de son siècle; et l'autre est en arrière du sien.⁶

The contradiction between this statement and her previous emphasis on the modernity of the Napoleonic regime ("It is impossible to arrive at great power, except by taking advantage of the times; accordingly, Bonaparte studied the spirit of his age with great care")⁷ is explained, if not resolved, by the fact that Mme. de Staël used the term "modern" in two distinct senses: the first, in an explicitly prescriptive sense, to identify that set of attributes which she deemed to be of value; the second, in a descriptive sense, to classify regimes according to the presence of certain traits, regardless of the ends towards which they are directed.

By acknowledging its potential for modernity, Mme. de Staël departed from the usual practice of assigning despotism to a low stage of historical development. Even Adam Ferguson, who propounded a theory of progress and detailed the peculiar susceptibilities of modern or "polished" societies to despotic rule, did not assume that this despotism would appropriate the instruments of modernity in a distinctive manner. He thought, rather, that despotism signified a breakdown of progress, a return to a stagnant and passive form of rule akin to that practiced in China. The Napoleonic experience was necessary to achieve new theoretical perspectives. For certain thinkers, notably Benjamin Constant, the unique modes of oppression enlisted by Napoleon could

not be adequately conveyed by a concept traditionally associated with a static, and by comparison, moderate form of domination. Hence he substituted for despotism the term "usurpation." That Mme. de Staël did not follow this procedure, despite the fact that she, like Constant,⁹ wished to underscore the novel aspects of the Napoleonic regime, is due to the fact that her account was intended to serve two quite incompatible purposes: to isolate and condemn the unique horrors of Napoleon and the Terror, and to refute the conservative's claim that such horrors were unprecedented. Thus at the cost of sacrificing consistency, he refused to abandon the older concept since it established the continuity of oppression throughout French history.

* * * *

Mme. de Staël's continued use of the term served, in addition, to illuminate her intellectual debt to Montesquieu. For Montesquieu, it will be recalled, despotism was a heuristic construct (as well as a political weapon), connoting the arbitrary rule of one man, unrestrained by law. Its principle was "fear", by which Montesquieu understood a state of perpetual insecurity. A system of total domination, it was distinguished by a primitive and precarious economy, a low level of cultural development, and atomized egalitarian social structure. Above all, Montesquieu stressed that the mechanics of despotism were simple. In contrast to the complex texture of a free society in which semi-autonomous social

groups and legal restraints served to challenge or delimit the exercise of political power, despotic power was unchecked (save by the force of custom and religion) and obedience remained passive.

Unlike Montesquieu, Mme. de Staël regarded her model of despotism as a "real" rather than an "ideal" type; its attributes, she insisted, were all empirically realized under the Napoleonic regime. However her concept of despotism drew more consistently on Montesquieu's categories of "nature" and "principle" than did her models of free society. Following Montesquieu, she supposed that the nature of the despotism was one man unrestrained by law. But whereas Montesquieu had recognized the informal checks of custom and religion, Mme. de Staël depicted Napoleonic rule as operating entirely without fetter:

Dans les autres gouvernements despotiques, il y a des usages, des lois, une religion que le maître n'enfreint jamais, quelque absolu qu'il soit; mais en France, et dans l'Europe France, comme tout est nouveau, le passé ne saurait être une garantie, et l'on peut tout craindre comme tout espérer, suivant qu'on sert ou non les intérêts de l'homme qui ose se donner lui-même, et lui seul, pour but à la race humaine entière.¹⁰

This total absence of restraint, Mme. de Staël attributed to the spiritual and ethical vacuum which was a legacy of the Terror. All positive social bonds, all customary standards of behavior, all religious belief had been eroded or anesthetized; the motive of self-preservation alone remained to guide men's actions:

Ce qui servait singulièrement le pouvoir de Bonaparte, c'est qu'il n'avait rien à ménager que la masse. Toutes les existences individ-

uelles étaient anéanties par dix ans de troubles ... Personne en France ne pouvait croire sa situation assurée; les hommes de toutes les classes, ruinés ou enrichis, bannis ou récompensés, se trouvaient également un à un, pour ainsi dire; entre les mains du pouvoir ... Il n'y avait pas un Français qui n'eût quelque chose à demander au gouvernement, et ce quelque chose était la vie ...¹¹

Mme. de Staël's recognition of the phenomenon of "mass society" and its potential as a breeding ground for a totalist form of domination anticipated Tocqueville and, to an even greater extent, the findings of contemporary students of totalitarianism. For while Tocqueville, in the Democracy in America, suggested the vulnerability of mass society to despotic rule, his conception of the despotic state as "regular, quiet and gentle"¹² was distinct from that of Mme. de Staël who, like modern analysts of totalitarianism, attributed to it a quality of revolutionary dynamism.

Again relying on Montesquieu, Mme de Staël made fear the principle of despotic government. Much of her analysis, like Montesquieu's, interpreted fear in the sense of insecurity, although she went beyond this meaning to explore the subtle connections between fear and positive support. In a strikingly modern account of the psychological strategy of the despot, Mme. de Staël recorded a careful process of psychic destruction and intellectual reconditioning that converted passive obedience into mobilized consent. She imputed to Napoleon a sinister design to destroy methodically the rational autonomy of his

subjects, transforming them into empty receptacles available for indoctrination and mass mobilization. In view of her observation that Napoleon had inherited a mass society, such a program would appear superfluous. Nevertheless, Mme. de Staël often spoke as though Napoleon had to create deliberately the conditions which would enable him to exercise his unique mode of rule.

Fear, in Montesquieu's sense of insecurity, was the passion appropriate to the first stage of Napoleon's program. As in Montesquieu, it was immediately linked to the denial of constitutional and juridical guarantees. While in terms of formal governmental structure, the complex arrangements of the Napoleonic state bore little resemblance to the primitive apparatus of the Montesquieuan despotism, the operative reality of the two despotisms was identical. Both concentrated political power in the hands of a single individual, brooking no restraints on either the method or the range of his rule. By a variety of techniques, Napoleon successfully neutralized all institutional checks on his power: the Tribunate was purged of hostile members; the Assembly was deprived of the opportunity to debate substantive issues; financial leverage was established over members of the Senate; and the civil court system was effectively circumvented by the constant resort to special tribunals and military commissions. The facade of constitutionalism thus camouflaged political reality, heightening the insecurity of Napoleon's subjects. The rule of law was studiously transgressed: "Bonaparte ... se gardait bien de mettre un terme à ces inquiétudes par des lois fixes

qui pussent faire connaître à chacun ses droits. Il rendait à tel ou tel ses biens, à tel ou tel il les ôtait pour toujours ..."¹³ Napoleon acknowledged no substantive limitations on the range of his powers: no rights were considered inviolable, no realms of human activity escaped his prerogatives:

Il ne voulait pas qu'un seul individu de son temps existât par lui-même qu'on se mariât, qu'on eût de la fortune, qu'on choisit un séjour, qu'on exerçât un talent, qu'une résolution quelconque permission.¹⁴

An analogous arrangement was manifest in the social sphere, where a facade of complex social hierarchies served to mask the servile equality of the nation. Napoleon had, Mme. de Staël observed, painstakingly revived the intricate social structure of the Old Regime as depicted by Montesquieu's monarchical model: the elaborate pomp and etiquette at court, the articulation of interests by contending social groups, the bestowal of favors by the sovereign, all were shared features of monarchy and Napoleonic despotism. However, a crucial difference separated the two models. In the despotism, titles and distinctions were neither ascriptive nor tradition-bound as suggested by the principle of "honor", but rather were the unique creation of Napoleon and permanently tied to his prerogatives. Hence far from presupposing the semi-autonomous power base that Montesquieu deemed essential to political liberty, these social preferences, bestowed as rewards for obsequious loyalty, served to tighten the reins of despotic power. This arrangement, it may be noted, also contrasted with that of England which,

according to Montesquieu and Mme. de Staël, rooted social privilege in practical ability and achievement, a criterion distinct from the arbitrary will of the sovereign.¹⁵ The precarious gratifications afforded by this social strategy gained for Napoleon not only the blind obedience of the old nobility who eagerly resumed the former roles,

Il fit occuper la plupart des charges de sa maison par des nobles de l'ancien régime ... Chaque fois qu'un gentilhomme de l'ancienne cour rappelait l'étiquette du temps jadis, proposait une révérence de plus, une certaine façon de frapper à la porte ... de plier une lettre, de la terminer par telle ou telle formule, il était accueilli comme s'il avait fait faire des progrès au bonheur de l'espèce humaine.¹⁶

but also the attachment of a new elite greedy to s'ennoblir,

Les hommes qui avaient pris part à la révolution ne voulaient plus qu'il y eut des castes au-dessus d'eux. Bonaparte les a ralliés à lui en leur promettant les titres et les rangs dont ils avaient dépouillé les nobles. 'Vous voulez l'égalité!' leur disait-il: je ferai mieux encore, je vous donnerai l'inégalité en votre faveur'...¹⁷

Thus the social reality of the Napoleonic system was, like that of Montesquieu's despotism, simple. For despite the complex outward structure of society, all were equal in slavery to the despot. What Montesquieu did not anticipate was the Napoleonic disjunction between form and content; that, within a different political setting, the attributes he ascribed to monarchy could serve with even greater effectiveness as instruments of despotic power.

Having denied his subjects the security of constitutional guarantees and the protective cover of social rank, Napoleon proceeded to strip away the last vestiges of their

individual identities. The capacity for independent thought was destroyed by a rigid policy of censorship, of which I shall speak later. Napoleon's intrusions into the intimate society of his subjects struck at the womb of their moral values; his weapons ranged from custom ("on le voyait s'occuper avec persévérance de la toilette des femmes, afin que leurs époux, ruinés par leurs dépenses, fussent plus souvent obligés de recourir à lui ...")¹⁸ to political sanction.

Combien n'a-t-on vu de familles divisées par la frayeur que causaient les moindres rapports avec les exilés: Dans le commencement de la tyrannie, quelques actes de courage se font remarquer; mais par degrés le chagrin altère les sentiments, les contrariétés se fatiguent; l'on vient à penser que les disgrâces de ses amis sont causés par leurs propres fautes ... Ainsi l'amitié, l'amour même, se glaçant dans tous les cœurs; les qualités intimes tombent avec les vertus publiques; on ne s'aime plus entre soi, après avoir cessé d'aimer la patrie ...¹⁹

Indeed exile, which Mme. de Staël interpreted as a social rather than a political deprivation²⁰, was Napoleon's most effective means of institutionalizing anxieties, and served as a metaphor in her writings for the annihilation of privacy that distinguished despotic rule. The economic realm, too, suffered from the arbitrary character of the despotism: because property was insecure, it could contribute neither to the stability of the state nor to the enlightenment and independence of its owners; nor could public credit operate on so precarious foundation.²¹

To this point the distinctions between the accounts of despotism provided by Montesquieu and Mme. de Staël are

not of striking significance. Although Mme. de Staël placed greater stress on the instruments of fear, "le gouvernement de la police, un corps permanent d'espions, et dans la suite, sept prisons d'État, dans lesquelles les détenus ne pouvaient être jugés par aucun tribunal ..." 22, and recognized the role of political illusion in perpetuating anxieties, both theorists regarded fear, defined as a state of insecurity and normlessness, to be indispensable to the functioning of the despotic system. But whereas Montesquieu had maintained that servile obedience was the ultimate objection of the despot, Mme. de Staël contended that, under the new form of Napoleonic despotism, suppression of all resistance was only the first of a two step process of psychic re-education. Napoleon's ultimate demand was not for submission, but for support; he required a nation of enthusiastic partisans, not vacuous corpses. Montesquieu's depiction of the despotic subject as timid, ignorant, and lacking in spirit no longer adequately portrayed this new character type. For it was no longer sufficient that previous modes of behavior be broken down; positive patterns of thought and action remained to be cultivated. The Napoleonic regime derived its uniqueness from its unprecedented attempt at mass re-education and mobilization.

Napoleon's efforts at creating positive attachments to his leadership were facilitated by the events of the Terror. His initial ploy was to manipulate the nation's fear of Jacobinism to his own advantage:

Le sortilège le plus puissant dont Bonaparte se soit servi pour fonder son pouvoir, c'est ...

la terreur qu'inspirait le nom seul de jacobinisme... aussi Bonaparte paralysait-il toute espèce de résistance à ses volontés par ces mots: 'Voulez-vous que je vous livre aux jacobins?' ... Enfin même alors on ne l'aimait pas, mais on le préférait ...²³

Of greater significance was the positive lesson taught by the Jacobins. From them Napoleon acquired the technique of exploiting recently surfaced republican sentiments. He defined his status in terms of the revolutionary principle of popular sovereignty, which held that the function of government was to implement the national will. By representing himself as the incarnation of the will, and hence the living symbol of the revolution, Napoleon orchestrated the enthusiastic support of the nation:

Il prit par degrés la place que tenait la Révolution dans toutes les têtes, et reporta sur son nom seul tout le sentiment national qui avait grandi la France aux yeux étrangers ...²⁴

To foster the illusion of his legitimacy, Napoleon inaugurated a system of mass indoctrination. Whereas older forms of despotism had either silenced or ignored men of letters, Napoleon recognized their potential as builders of mass support:

Dans le dix-huitième siècle ... les puissants ne se doutaient pas de l'influence des écrits sur l'opinion, et ils laissaient la littérature à peu près aussi tranquille que les sciences physiques le sont encore aujourd'hui ...²⁵

The level of technology -- advances in the art of printing permitting the proliferation of published materials -- and the level of culture -- the spread of literacy combined

with a new attentiveness to public matters-- presented the unprecedented possibility of internalizing consensus by establishing control over men's thoughts. Thus together with the censorship of dissenting views enforced by a vast network of literary police, Napoleon set into motion the machinery of political propaganda. The character of this "tyrannie bavarde" ²⁶ is best described by Mme. de Staël:

Les feuilles périodiques répétaient toutes la même chose chaque jour, sans que jamais il fut permis de les contredire²⁷... Bonaparte, lorsqu'il disposait d'un million d'hommes armés, n'en attachait pas moins d'importance à l'art de guider l'esprit public par des gazettes²⁸... Le joug de l'autorité et l'esprit d'imitation étaient imposés à la littérature, comme le journal officiel dictait les articles de foi en politique. Un bon instinct de despotisme faisait sentir aux agents de la police littéraire que l'originalité dans le manière d'écrire peut conduire à l'indépendance du caractère ...²⁹

Napoleon recognized that fear, apart from its role in creating an atmosphere of general anxiety, could serve as a mechanism of support when directed against designated categories of internal and external enemies of the regime. This strategy, which founded loyalty on the enthusiasm of shared animosities, fitted well with his claim to represent the national will; by identifying himself with the nation, Napoleon simultaneously denied the legitimacy of all opposition. Internal enemies were rooted out, according to Mme. de Staël's account, by a network of spies and police of unprecedented scope. Once identified, full propaganda value was derived from their heresy, "la réputation de chacun dépend d'une calomnie répandue dans les gazettes qui se multiplient de toutes les parts sans qu'on accorde à personne la

possibilité de les refuter ..."³⁰.

War or the persecution of external enemies, was dictated by this same logic of negative consensus, and was a permanent feature of the Napoleonic despotism. The entire educational system of the state was geared to the formation of a disciplined body of soldiers, "Toute l'éducation publique a pris un caractère militaire; le roulement de tambour annonce l'heure des déclinasons, et les caporaux président à l'instruction littéraire."³¹ War figured in Napoleon's design not only as a means of territorial expansion with the object of global domination, but also as an instrument of national solidarity. A policy of military mobilization and conquest restored, on the level of the nation, a sense of efficacy and purpose that the despotic system denied the individual. The vicarious satisfaction of military victory offset the humiliation of institutionalized personal injustice:

Pouvait-on opprimer la nation dans l'intérieur, sans lui donner au moins le funeste dédommagement de dominer ailleurs à son tour?³²

* * * *

Before concluding this section with a critique of Mme. de Staël's interpretation of despotism and a discussion of its contrasts with her concept of free society, it is intriguing to remark upon the anticipation of modern theories of totalitarianism contained in her analysis. I do not intend to enter here into the contemporary debate over the usefulness of the concept³³, or to discuss the diverse and often ambiguous definitions of totalitarianism that have been tendered. Instead, I shall concentrate exclusively on

the commonly advanced claim that totalitarianism represents a qualitatively distinctive historical phenomenon, while despotism remains an old-fashioned concept of primarily antiquarian interest.

Among those who would assert in its qualitative uniqueness, the most widely recognized feature of totalitarian rule is its deliberate annihilation of the boundaries between public and private life. Sartori's argument is typical:

It is my thesis, then, that a new term has a raison d'être if it expresses a new idea. Therefore "totalitarianism" can be used fruitfully if by it we mean to indicate the unprecedented intensity, pervasiveness, and penetration ... that political domination can assume ... The essential point being that totalitarianism denotes the imprisonment of the whole society within the state, an all pervasive political domination over the extra-political life of man.³⁴

A conceptual prerequisite of Sartori's position is an acknowledgement of the state and society as distinct entities; if boundaries are to be consciously transgressed, there need first be recognition of their existence. Thus, against Popper³⁵, it is appropriate to distinguish totalitarianism from the "totalism" of the Greek polis. Nevertheless, students of totalitarianism are wrong to conclude that it is a form of domination entirely without theoretical precedent. The intellectual roots of the modern concept are properly traced to those eighteenth century thinkers who, proclaiming the distinctiveness (if not necessarily the opposition) of society and government, attempted to define and guarantee the limits of political power. Within

this context, and due to the seminal influence of Montesquieu, despotism assumed prominence as the term which connoted not merely the exceptional abuse of power by a ruler, but a system of total domination. Yet despite his vigorous reformulation of the concept, Montesquieu could not conceive of despotic rule as operating wholly without fetter. It was only with the exaggerated liberal reaction against the ascendancy of Napoleon that a truly all encompassing political encounter became, at least, an intellectual possibility. Although the actual degree of control exercised by Napoleon fell far short of that wielded by twentieth century regimes, the theoretical foundations of contemporary scholarship had been laid. These are patent affinities between Hannah Arendt's conception of totalitarianism as "the permanent domination of each single individual in each and every sphere of life",³⁶ and Mme. de Staël's observation that "(Napoleon) entrait dans les moindres détails des relations de chaque individu ... de tenir entre ses mains les fils les plus déliés comme les chaînes les plus fortes ... personne ne pouvait plus suivre en rien sa propre volonté, dans les plus grandes comme dans les plus petites circonstances."³⁷

The distinctiveness of totalitarianism has been argued in yet another manner. There have been attempts to identify totalitarian rule with what Barber has termed a unique "essence", an "abstract, non-measurable (emotive) attribute" such as Arendt's "total terror".³⁸ The methodological origins of this strategy can again be traced to Montesquieu, who ascribed a distinct operative passion to

each governmental type. Although there are important similarities between Montesquieu's concept of fear (the principle he ascribed to the despotism) and the idea of totalitarian terror, their connotations are not identical. For Montesquieu, fear was associated with a passive or negative posture; for students of totalitarianism, terror becomes a condition of positive support. As I have shown, Mme. de Staël's account bridges these two interpretations.

Perhaps the most formidable claim for the modernity of totalitarianism has been advanced by those who have stressed the structure and instruments of totalitarian rule, rather than the abstract emotive basis of its operation. According to thinkers like C.J. Friedrich and Michael Curtis,³⁹ the presence of modern administrative organization and a sophisticated technology separate totalitarianism from all previous forms of domination. Certainly this characterization was not anticipated by Montesquieu, who conceived of despotism as a static and simple form of rule. To a great extent, however, it was foreshadowed by Mme. de Staël who, in light of the Napoleonic experience, reformulated the theory of despotism to include complex organizational networks of mass mobilization.

All this is not to overestimate the modernity of Mme. de Staël's account. In the final analysis, her treatment of Napoleonic despotism resolves into a curious amalgam of archaism and anticipation of the twentieth century. Although she described the terroristic essence of the despotism, the most formidable weapon she could ascribe to the

despot was exile, not mass executions or deportation to concentration camps. While she pointed to programs of indoctrination and consensus-building, she could not anticipate the development of the single mass party, of ideologically oriented youth movements, and other modern instruments of mass mobilization. Her analysis of the despotic economy was rooted in Montesquieu's assertion that it was weak and precarious, and thus shed no light on the centrally controlled economies of modern totalitarian states. Nonetheless, despite these and other points of distinction, the resemblances between the two concepts remain significant. Both are defined in systemic terms, and stress the total control sought over men's actions and thoughts; both place emphasis on the relation between fear and consent; both explore the vulnerability of mass society to total domination; and both point to the role of technology in shaping the character of rule.

* * * *

Despite its many suggestive insights and anticipations of twentieth century perspectives, Mme. de Staél's concept of despotism is open to challenge on a variety of grounds. First, Mme. de Staél recoiled from assigning despotism a determinate historical status. Because she pursued the conflicting strategies of establishing its continuity with the past and proclaiming its novelty to the revolutionary epoch, her formulation remained conceptually imprecise. Second, Mme. de Staél's sweeping moral condemnation of Bonapartism often crippled her analytical capacities.

For example, the public works projects instituted by Napoleon were altogether disassociated from utilitarian ends, and interpreted exclusively as instruments of despotic power (an unfair move by Mme. de Staël who, within the context of a liberal society, would doubtlessly interpret Napoleon's motivation as "higher self-interest", i.e. that felicitous form of egoism which simultaneously advances the general welfare):

L'on doit au gouvernement impérial les musées des arts et les embellissements de Paris, des grands chemins, des canaux qui facilitaient les communications des départements; enfin tout ce qui pouvait frapper l'imagination en montrant comme dans le Simplon et le mont Cenis, que la nature obéissait à Napoléon presque aussi docilement que les hommes.⁴⁰

Her treatment of the Napoleonic economy suffered from similar distortions. Influenced by Montesquieu's account, Mme. de Staël persisted in regarding the despotic economy as primitive and precarious, rather than acknowledge the sweeping financial reforms inaugurated by Napoleon. Nor did she devote much space to a discussion of the Code Napoléon, which formally incorporated many of her cherished values. Third, Mme. de Staël failed to define clearly the interconnections of fear, coercion, and consensus. In certain passages, she suggested that Napoleon fell heir to a mass society, that the boundaries between public and private existence had been eroded by ten years of revolution, and thus that the basis of his power was consensual. Elsewhere she maintained that Napoleon was the author of a deliberate plan to destroy the independence and autonomy of his subjects, that his power was repressive and illegitimate, that his support

was founded on coercion. In either situation, a fourth difficulty is inescapable. Mme. de Staël attributed to Napoleon strategies of rule that were manifestly incompatible with her assertion that he either inherited or created a nation of vacuous and fragmented beings. For instance, she cited his able manipulation of class interests, a strategy which, of course, presupposed that class interests were still consciously perceived. Similarly, her analysis of war as a compensation for the loss of individual autonomy presumed that Napoleon's subjects had retained sufficient self-awareness to be frustrated by their situation, and hence that he had been unsuccessful in shaping a consensual society. A final problem centers around the extreme reductionism of Mme. de Staël's claim that despotism pivoted on the will of one man. Even Napoleon's downfall, she argued, was a direct consequence of a character flaw which propelled him to value flattery above truthfulness (her position here owes much to Greek concepts of tyranny⁴¹):

Il aimait moins les louanges vraies que les flatteries serviles ... par degrés, l'on n'osait plus lui parler avec vérité sur rien. Il a fini par ignorer qu'il faisait froid an Moscou des le mois de novembre, parce que personne, parmi ses courtisans, ne s'est trouve assez Romain pour oser lui dire une chose aussi simple⁴²

Like Montesquieu, Mme. de Staël wished to convey the simplicity of the despotic system, a simplicity which underlay the complex facade of Bonapartism. Her concept of despotism was, however, offered as a real rather than an ideal type, leaving it open to challenge on the basis of empirical accuracy.

* * * *

Despite its shortcomings, Mme. de Staël's concept of despotism performs the valuable service of defining in negative terms the character of a free or liberal society. The first set of distinctions between the free and despotic models pivot on their respective visions of human nature. Mme. de Staël directly took over from Montesquieu the notion of antithetical passions animating the two types: fear being appropriate to despotism; and love of liberty (read: security) to representative government. In other passages, she suggested that despotism reduced its members to creatures of narrow self-interest ("c'est par leurs défauts qu'ils soumettent les hommes à son empire"⁴³... de faire supporter une semblable tyrannie, il fallait contenter l'ambition de tous ceux qui s'engageraient à la maintenir").⁴⁴ Here too, a contrast may be drawn with the arrangements of a free society which, while not denying man's self-interested motives, channeled these motives to benefit the public weal. Nor could any single facet of human nature, albeit self-interest, adequately account for the mechanisms of free society. Whereas despotism impoverished man's nature,⁴⁵ freedom encouraged its manifold complexities. In contrast to the servile equality of the despotic social structure, liberal society was stratified on the basis of its members' natural aptitudes and abilities.

A free social order was, according to Mme. de Staël, characterized by a delimited constitutionalist state, a decentralized structure of political power, the recognition and protection of individual privacy, and a tolerant and enlight-

ened texture of social relations. Contrary to the implications of certain of her polemical formulations, Mme. de Staël's brand of liberalism neither devalued political life nor presupposed that the political and social realms operated on antithetical principles. Rather, it insisted upon negative, or constitutionalist, liberty as a precondition of political involvement. Only when man's intellectual and religious life, as well as his domestic, economic and social relations were secure from arbitrary political intrusions could civic participation remain non-corrupting and contribute to the realization of excellence. The autonomous functioning of the various social spheres served, in turn, to lessen the need for governmental action by providing supplemental non-legal restraints on men's behavior. It was precisely this balance struck between public and private spheres, this complex differentiation of social realms, that was lacking in despotism. The despotic type, characterized by the centralized and arbitrary rule of a single person, substituted for the pluralistic interactions of the liberal order a debilitating chain of dependencies linked ultimately to the selfish interests of the despot. In polar opposition to the institutions of a free society, despotism was distinguished by a precarious family unit, a primitive economy, and a bankrupt cultural, intellectual and spiritual life (a result of censorship and military education). The impoverishment of private life secured total dependence upon the despot, a situation in which political participation (a prominent element in both despotic and liberal political types) contrib-

uted to the corruption rather than the excellence of the despotic subject.

This crucial distinction between the free and despotic models is overlooked by Steven Golin who, in his essay on Mme. de Staël's Thermidorian republic, argues that her focus on "culture as social control"⁴⁶ is evidence of her illiberal leanings. Viewing his subject through the prism of contemporary experience (which provides him the dubious excuse to pun, "the liberal realism of Staëlism anticipates the Socialist Realism of Stalinism"⁴⁷), Golin suggests that Mme. de Staël's liberal rhetoric masked totalist political aspirations; that her program of republican education was, in fact, an unprecedented attempt to establish an all pervasive political order:

Every aspect of culture becomes subordinated to ideology, and ideology becomes the strategy of concealing the reality of class rule. Culture ceases to be an inessential and therefore independent realm, and becomes a medium for integrating the masses into the status quo ... Feeling, a formerly private realm, can no longer be left to chance ... Control of feelings becomes a political necessity ...⁴⁸

Ironically, Golin's attack parallels Mme. de Staël's own indictment of Napoleon. While certain strands of Mme. de Staël's thought do indeed appear to support Golin (for instance, her positive image of public opinion), his analysis both lacks historical perspective and underestimates the complexity of her views. Rather than anticipating a future totalitarian regime, Mme. de Staël's liberal model reaches back to the Montesquieu's vision of society, according to which the maintenance of order was achieved by the mutually

sustaining interaction of the political and social spheres. It reflects Montesquieu's insight that social determinants-- culture, religion, customs, etc. -- serve to buttress the functions of the state, with all spheres contributing to produce a distinctive national ethos. Moreover, missing from Golin's account is an appreciation of Mme. de Staël's very real valuation of negative liberty -- a appreciation to be derived from a comparison of free society with its opposite type. Her ancient/modern dichotomy having proved a crude oversimplification of her views, it is instead the free/despotic dichotomy that clearly establishes privacy (vis-à-vis its relation to individual autonomy and moral excellence) as a key element in her definition of the good society.

Mme. de Staël's concept of Napoleonic despotism is richly suggestive on many levels. My analysis has incorporated perspectives both practical (its role as a weapon of partisan politics under the Restoration) and analytical (its function as an a contrario definition of liberalism). Before moving on, however, I must briefly consider it from yet another angle: its place in the development of the Napoleonic legend. The legend, which grew to epic proportions during the nineteenth century, had its origins in Napoleon's own memoirs, composed at St. Helena in a deliberate effort to redeem his historical image. The legend's early adherents included Byron, Stendahl and Heine; Hugo and Balzac ranked among its later expositors. Inspired by the muse of Romanticism and the concerns of practical po-

litics, these writers eulogized Napoleon as the Promethean architect of France's most glorious era. Paradoxically, this idealized portrait of Napoleon owed a significant debt to Mme. de Staël. For it was her model of the Napoleonic despotism -- exaggerated in the manner of Montesquieu's ideal type analysis -- that informed popular perspectives following the successful publication of the Considérations in 1818. Indeed the impact of her indictment proved so considerable that would-be defenders of Napoleon had first to take on the ghost of de Staël. Thus, justifying the strident polemics of his Vie de Napoleon, Stendhal wrote:

J'écris l'histoire de Napoleon pour repondre a un: li-
belle. C'est une entreprise imprudente puisque ce li-
belle est lancé par le premier talent du siècle (the
reference is to Mme. de Staël)...⁴⁹

If Mme. de Staël had unintentionally nourished the Napoleonic myth by provoking her opponents to prodigious exaggerations, she must also be recognized as the founder of a counter-myth, or anti-Napoleonic legend, whose exponents came to include Lamartine and de Vigny. Although long overshadowed by its rival legend, the demonic vision of Napoleon regained ascendancy following the collapse of the Second Empire through the writings of Hippolyte Taine. In contrast to the proliferation of studies centering about "le culte de Napoleon," the anti-Napoleonic myth had received scant attention from contemporary scholars;⁵⁰ an important dimension of Mme. de Staël's legacy thus remains to be explored.

ITALY:

In the following sections on Italy, Germany and Russia, I shall be dealing with national societies which, as classified by Mme. de Staël, fell outside the categories of "free" or "despotic". Nonetheless they shed considerable light on both these categories and demand inclusion in any comprehensive survey of Mme. de Staël's social and political thought. Her studies on Italy, Germany and Russia point up the tension between universalism and relativism that runs through her writings: her acute sensitivity to the unique constellation of forces distinguishing each nation counteracted by her abstract liberal standard of right. Mme. de Staël's practical political concerns further exacerbated this intellectual tension. The liberal criterion of good government remained her most potent weapon against Napoleon, and she frequently applied it to all nations as an absolute standard of right. On the other hand, Napoleon's designs for European hegemony caused her to be wary of universalistic claims, and thus she encouraged resistance to the Emperor by championing the pluralistic expression of national cultures. Other strategic imperatives also nourished Mme. de Staël's relativism: for example, her paeans to Russia's barbaric military spirit, ostensibly incompatible with her enlightened liberalism, must be interpreted in the context of the 1812 War. Yet, notwithstanding the propagandistic thrust of her inquiries, Mme. de Staël was far from a crude polemicist. Her studies of Italy, Germany and Russia were informed by extensive research and, as attested to by her

Carnets de voyage, assiduous first-hand fact gathering; they displayed an analytical scaffolding indebted to Montesquieu and were skillfully incorporated into literary genres as diverse as the novel (Corinne -- Italy), the treatise (De l'Allemagne) and the memoir (Dix années d'exil -- Russia).

Mme. de Staël's first sustained attempt at social and political comparison was her investigation of Italy in the Corinne (1807). Prior to 1800 her interest in that nation had been slight, as evidenced by the brief and uncomplimentary treatment accorded it in the De la littérature. However various intellectual influences impelled Mme. de Staël to reconsider her assessment of Italy and to undertake, in 1804, the voyage which provided the backdrop to Corinne. Prominent among these influences was the Voyage sur la scène des six derniers livres de l'Eneide of Charles Victor Bonstetten, a family friend of the Necker's. Mme. de Staël read the manuscript of the work in 1803 and, by her own testimony, drew upon it during her travels, "La campagne de Rome m'a frappée par le souvenir de votre livre," she wrote to Bonstetten, "c'est de la description à l'objet que mon intérêt a procédé."¹ The evocation of classical antiquity that colored Bonstetten's writings also figured in the aesthetic doctrines of Mme. de Staël's newly acquired tutor, A.W. Schlegel. Schlegel, who accompanied her through Italy, was trained as a classicist and, reveling in the diversity of world literatures, had contributed pioneering studies on Dante and Petrarch. Her other travelling companion was J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, the author of the

Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du moyen âge, whom Mme. de Staël had met and befriended in 1801. Sismondi paralleled Schlegel's aesthetic excavations of Italy's past with his own political inquiry into the historical roots of Italian liberty. Mme. de Staël paid Sismondi the double compliment of adopting his historical strategy in the Corinne and publicly bestowing upon his own enterprise her unreserved praise:

... il ressuscite avec bonheur les temps obscurs de l'histoire qui renferment tant d'actions courageuses et nobles; il semble qu'il retrouve des amis dans tous les Italiens de premier âge qui ont lutté pendant des siècles pour conquérir et maintenir leur indépendance ... Plusieurs écrivains, Machiavel à la tête, se sont occupés de raconter quelques époques de l'histoire de leur pays; mais nul n'avait rassemblée cette multitude d'événements, épars et pays divers, sous le point de vue général des efforts qu'a fait l'Italie pendant cinq siècles pour repousser les étrangers et se maintenir indépendante.²

Yet another spur to Mme. de Staël's curiosity was provided by Chateaubriand's description of the Roman Campagne, published in 1804 in his celebrated Lettre à Fontanes. Indeed, as Sismondi bears out, Italy had been the subject of heated controversy between Chateaubriand and his followers who espoused a detached and aesthetic perspective and the followers of Bonstetten, like himself, whose posture was engaged and humanitarian. As for Mme. de Staël, Sismondi argued, she availed herself of both positions:

Mme. de Staël ne fait que resumer les points de vue opposés des philanthropes et des esthètes, en espèce de Bonstetten et de Sismondi d'une part, et de Chateaubriand et Guillaume de Humboldt, de l'autre.³

French interest in Italy was not, however, confined exclu-

sively to the intellectual elite. Italy had come into popular vogue with the publication in 1804 of Mme. de Krudener's novel Valérie. And although Mme. de Staël professed to despise it ("Valérie ... m'a dégoutée ..."),⁴ the novel left its impress on her Corinne.

Politics, never far from Mme. de Staël's thoughts, also contributed to her newly awakened interest in Italy. If, in 1804, Napoleon had not yet consolidated his rule over that nation, political opponents like Mme. de Staël instinctively sensed his hegemonic intentions. The Italians' servile acquiescence to their most recent conqueror profoundly disconcerted her. She concurred with Napoleon's appraisal of the Italians as a weak, corrupted and divided people, yet did not see a remedy for this condition in national union imposed by Napoleon but rather in the initiatives of the Italians themselves to recapture their lost liberty and civic virtue. This theme is implicit throughout Corinne, superficially the least political of Mme. de Staël's major works. The unaccustomed subtlety of her political commentary was, as Simone Balayé makes clear,⁵ a consequence of the intensifying pressures of Napoleonic censorship. Ironically, while Mme. de Staël failed to persuade Napoleon of the political innocence of her novel, her biographers were firmly convinced of its apolitical character. "Ce livre," Mme. Necker de Saussure wrote of Corinne, "est peut-être le seul ouvrage de Mme. de Staël qui soit entièrement étranger à la politique."⁶ Nonetheless Mme. de Staël's political strategy, if not painfully obvious, was

thoroughly accessible to the majority of her readers. Her Montesquelian framework, with its implicit repudiation of universalist claims, insinuates itself throughout the novel: plot lines constantly give way to social and political exegesis; protagonists are depicted as caricatures of their national traits rather than as individual personalities. To condemn the imperialistic designs of Napoleon, she laid stress on those causes that formed Italy's distinctive national spirit. She vacillated, however, between championing the complete expression of that spirit in all spheres of life and modifying it to conform to the ethos of liberalism. The mutual yet foredoomed position of Corinne, the consummate Italian,⁷ and Ostwald, the prototypical Englishman, can be seen to symbolize this tension in her thought.

As French domination of Italy frustrated both these alternatives, Mme. de Staël's immediate objective was to inspire Italian resistance to foreign occupation. Long years of alien rule had exacted a heavy toll: divided into separate states and deprived of political rights, the Italians had grown indolent and helpless. Accordingly, Mme. de Staël was obliged to address the perennial question of how to restore political virtue to a corrupt people. Her strategy, as unfolded in the Corinne, pivoted on an appeal to history: invocations of Italy's past glories punctuate the novel, as do juxtaposed images of ancient grandeur and modern decadence. The chants of Corinne, whom Mme. de Staël cast as an improvisatrice, allude plaintively to Italy's unfortunate historical circumstances:

Eux seuls (les morts) sont honorés, eux seuls sont encore célèbres; nos destinées obscures relient l'éclat de nos ancêtres, notre existence actuelle ne laisse debout que le passé, ne se fait aucun bruit autour des souvenirs. Tous nos chefs-d'œuvre sont l'ouvrage de ceux qui ne sont plus ...⁸

Ancient ruins, often described in tiresome guidebook detail, serve as metaphors of lost dignity and inspirations to national rebirth:

Corinne se fait conduire ensuite au pied de l'escalier du Capitole actuel. L'entrée du Capitole ancien étoit par le Forum. Je voudrois bien, dit Corinne, que cet escalier fut le même que monta Scipion, lorsque, repoussant la calomnie par la gloire, il alla dans le temple pour rendre grâces aux dieux des victoires qu'avoit remportées. Mais ce nouvel escalier, mais ce nouveau Capitole a été bâti sur les ruines de l'ancien, pour recevoir le paisible magistrat qui porte à lui tout seul ce nom immense de sénateur romain ... Ici nous n'avons plus que des noms ...⁹

Mme. de Staël's use of historical example to renew and rejuvenate the Italian people was in the tradition of Machiavelli's ritorno ai principii (a tradition which boasted, in Mme. de Staël's era, J.C.L. de Sismondi as its most informed and sensitive expositor). She made no allusion, however, to Machiavelli's teaching that only an exceptional individual, acting alone, could effect such a regeneration. Her silence was perhaps attributable to the sinister example of Napoleon, although in other contexts she readily espoused the notion of a "Great Legislator." In any case, the proposed vehicle of national renewal remains ambiguous: was it inspired odes of the improvisatrice? the writings of novelists or historians? Nor is Mme. de Staël any clearer as to the historical epoch in which these principii are to be discovered: with apparent unconcern for the heterogeneity of her examples, she invoked

the images of republican Rome, imperial Rome and the medieval Italian republics. This confusion is further aggravated by her earlier ancient/modern dichotomy suggesting the anachronism of classical republican ideals. Mme. de Staël's position becomes less baffling, however, if examined in the light of her practical political purposes.

First, a common feature of her otherwise disparate historical models was that all exemplified self-governing political orders; none suffered the rule of foreign oppressors. In this context, she interpreted freedom to mean the absence of alien rule, making obvious allusions to the political situation of contemporary Italy. Second, when Mme. de Staël praised the public virtue and patriotic self-sacrifice of the ancient Italians, her intent was to counter-balance the gross civic indifference exhibited by the Italians of her own day. Clearly, she nourished no hope of re-suscitating the city-state or the medieval republic, though, as we have seen, she had sought to reconcile the idea of civic humanism to the liberal tradition. Rather, Mme. de Staël constructed a set of historical myths by which to awaken the Italians' dormant civic consciousness, and thus to inaugurate a new and independent political order. This strategy of synthesis, which enlisted the appeal to historical precedent as a mechanism of historical progress, would later reappear in the Considérations.

Mme. de Staël coupled her historical inquiry with a sociological examination of the causes which shaped the

character of modern Italy. This perspective, while not oblivious of history, was essentially synchronic and derived from Montesquieu. Mme. de Staël's innate intellectual curiosity harmonized with the political imperatives of her approach: in her view, Napoleon's imperialistic policies were nourished by the French tendency to self-congratulation which led, in turn, to an ignorance of foreign cultures. Smug provincialism was the distinguishing trait of the Count d'Erfeuil, the novel's prototypical Frenchman:

Le comte d'Erfeuil fit des reproches aimable à Corinne, de ce qu'elle l'oublioit tout-à-fait en s'exprimant dans les langues qu'il n'entendoit pas. 'Belle Corinne,' lui dit-il, 'grâce, parlez français, vous êtes vraiment digne.' ¹⁰

Given this disposition, Mme. de Staël's study of foreign societies was in itself suspect, and her plea for each nation's cultural self-expression brazenly subversive. Not surprisingly, Napoleon denounced the work as anti-French, "Je ne puis pardonner à Mme. de Staël d'avoir ravalé les Français dans son roman".¹¹ The perspective of the Corinne was not consistently relativist, however. The liberal ideals professed by the novel's English protagonist, Ostwald, often served as universal standard against which Italian society was to be measured. Ironically, Mme. de Staël's alertness to the dangers of ethnocentrism, so keen when focused on France, seemingly dissolved when her attention turned to England. Her analysis of Italy in the Corinne thus exhibits a tension between the abstract and relativist dimensions of her thought, a tension that would also be manifest in her studies of Germany and Russia.

An aggregate of disparate states, Italy conformed to no one political type. This fact, Mme. de Staël seemed to suggest, precluded a comprehensive approach to the nation, and required instead that each component state be examined separately:

Il est si vrai que les gouvernemens font le caractere des nations, que, dans cette meme Italie, vous voyez des différences de moeurs remarquables entre les divers états qui la composent. Les Piémontois, qui formoient un petit corps de nation, ont l'esprit plus militaire que le reste de l'Italie; les Florentins, qui possèdent ou la liberté, ou des princes d'un caractère liberal, sont éclairés et doux ... ¹²

At the same time, she realized that an exclusive concentration on the causes fragmented Italian society would offer little in the way of positive encouragement to the goal of Italian unity. To define Italy as a nation, collective similarities had to be established. Mme. de Staël made a step in this direction when she appealed to a common historical past. She also maintained, in apparent contradiction to the observation cited above, that certain socio-empirical causes transcended Italy's political divisions to give shape to a distinctive national character. In the novel, Corinne and Ostwald gave expression to Mme. de Staël's complex perception of the Italian character. Ostwald emphasized those traits which were antithetical to the ethos of liberalism, portraying the Italians as indolent, non-rational, mercurial and politically corrupt. Corinne's observations revealed, on the other hand, that these "flaws" were not irredeemable, that the Italian people had not been debased beyond the possibility of reform. Hence she distinguished Italian "indo-

lence" from syncophantic political servility¹³ and insisted that the absence of civic virtue had not adversely affected private morality.¹⁴ She also brought to the fore certain distinctive traits either overlooked or derided by Ostwald: spontaneity, imagination, sincerity, ebullience, a passion for the sublime and the beautiful. These traits, Corinne maintained, constituted the essence of the Italian character (Mme. de Staël ascribed no single overriding "principle" to Italy, as she would to Germany and Russia), and must find expression in any future political order. Now this national ethos was to be reconciled with the practical, nationalist, melancholy spirit appropriate to liberal institutions remained unclear, with Mme. de Staël straddling rather than synthesizing the two ideals.

The heterogeneous character of the Italian states did not deter Mme. de Staël from generalizing about the effect of political causes on the nation's spirit. Above all other political causes, she ranked the absence of participatory political liberty. This circumstance, rather than any curtailment of private liberties as in the despotism, accounted for the Italians' disinterest in civic life and lack of military ardor:

... chercherai-je à démêler pourquoi les hommes montrent souvent peu d'esprit militaire? Ils exposent leur vir pour l'amour et pour la haine avec une grande facilité ... mais ... ils aiment mieux la vie que des intérêts politiques qui ne les touchent guère, parce qu'ils n'ont point de patrie.¹⁵

By its very weakness, the political realm exerted an influence on all other spheres of activity. It explained

why the intellectual genius of the Italians was artistic rather than practical; it contributed to the indiscriminate leveling of Italian society and to the aesthetic bent of Italian Catholicism. Additionally, it produced a situation in which non-political forces gained monopolistic control over men's conduct. Indeed the scope of civil liberty in Italy appears equal to that secured de jure under the liberal model; and, as we shall observe, the Italians enjoyed a freedom from social pressure not equalled in England. Mme. de Staël would discern a similar pattern -- extensive personal freedom combined with an impoverished civic life -- in Germany. In both cases she railed against this imbalance, asserting the coequal status of citizen and individual, of public and private virtue. If the classical republic nurtured a one-dimensional civisme, then Italy and Germany occupied the other end of the spectrum as wholly privatized societies. Neither extreme conformed to Mme. de Staël's brand of "liberalism."

What was most striking about Italian society was its weakness as a determinant of men's behavior. Social artifice of the kind displayed in France -- mannered customs, received prejudices, subtle hierarchies -- held no sway over a people animated by true feelings and spontaneous emotions:

Ce ne sont pas des hommes assez habitués à la société et l'amour-propre qu'elle excite, pour s'occuper de l'effet qu'ils produisent; ils ne se laissent jamais détourner de leur plaisir par la vanité, ni de leur but par les applaudissemens. 16

Yet, as Ostwald recognized, amour-propre gave birth not only to the desires of vanity, but also to those positive civic commitments deriving from the need for public approval ("Ce n'est point la sincérité qui est la cause de ce genre de franchise, répondit Ostwald, mais l'indifférence pour l'opinion publique")¹⁷ The absence of social pressure, even in the salutary form of public opinion, contributed to civic apathy, and hence mirrored and abetted the impoverishment of Italian politics. Corinne, however, offered a more generous interpretation of the same set of social facts. She argued that the combination of an egalitarian social structure,¹⁸ and a "parfaite indépendance sociale" allowed for the free play of originality and genius. Social opinion, Ostwald's ultimate court of appeal and repository of moral values, appeared to Corinne as an arbitrary and oppressive power which inhibited self-expression and suffocated talent (Mme. de Staël's own ambivalence is reflected in the opposing views of her protagonists). To Corinne's mind, the absence of social pressures in Italy conduced to the flowering of originality and inspired flights of the imagination. And since this tolerance extended equality to both sexes, Italian women, unlike their English counterparts, could fully cultivate their talents without fear of social censure.

Having no political or social preoccupations, the Italians devoted considerable energies to their private relationships, and most especially to the intimacies of love. Their manner of love-making reflected a distinctive national

ethos, as Mme. de Staël established by comparing styles of love in Italy and England. In both nations man's intimate realtions constituted a primary source of his felicity; but whereas England bred a love fulfilled in the tranquil steady pleasures of domesticity, Italy nurtured a passionate and intense form of love which thrived outside the bonds of matrimony. Sexual equality carried over into romantic liasons; public broad-mindedness permitted the open pursuit of erotic pleasure:

... plusieurs attachemens se succedent ainsi, et sont également connus. Les femmes mettent si peu de mystere a cet egard, qu'elles avouent leurs liasons avec moins d'embarras que nos femmes (English women) n'en auroient en parlant de leurs epoux. 19

While Ostwald upheld the cause of married love in the name of stability, moral rectitude and moderation, Corinne, insinuating that human desires were essentially polygamous, defended the uninhibited sensuality of Italy. Neither viewpoint triumphs unequivocally in the novel, and those who regard Mme. de Staël exclusively as a spokeswoman for the bourgeoisie would do well to note this ambivalence in attitude. Lastly, Italy's sexual mores had important effects on other spheres of activity: sexual permissiveness contributed to the liberal attitudes of Italian Catholicism, as well as accounted for the neglect of the novel as a literary genre:

Aussi, dans cette nation ou on ne pense qu'à l'amour il n'y a pas un seul roman, parce que l'amour y est si rapide, si publique, qu'il ne prête à aucune genre de développement, et que, pour peindre veritablement les moeurs générales a cet egard, il faudroit commencer et finir dans la premiere page. 20

Apart from cultural causes, only religion remains to be examined as a determinant of the Italian character. Mme. de Staël's discussion of Catholicism in the Corinne displays a sympathy not present in earlier works like Delphine, where she condemned the secular designs of the priesthood and the sterility of the religion. Biographical circumstances accounted in part for this change in attitude, yet it also stemmed from Mme. de Staël's awareness of the way in which socio-cultural forces contribute to shape the content of religious belief. In Italy, Catholicism had evolved into a humane and indulgent creed, rooted in spontaneous sentiment and love of humanity:

... le catholicisme a pris, en Italie, un caractère de douceur et d'indulgence ... Loin donc que nos prêtres nous interdisent en aucune temps le pur sentiment de la joie, ils nous disent que ce sentiment exprime notre reconnaissance envers les dons du Createur.²¹

A religion of beauty, it inspired followers through the splendor of its institutions and the elaborate ceremony of its rituals. Its external displays of grandeur had a profoundly moralizing effect.²²

The nexus of art and religion attested to the important role of aesthetics in Italian life. Consistently Mme. de Staël emphasized the artistic bent of the nation, its devotion to beauty, its distinctive aesthetic genius:

Mais dans quel pays cependant a-t-on jamais témoigné plus qu'en Italie de l'admiration pour la littérature et les beaux-arts? L'histoire nous apprend que les papes, les princes et les peuples ont rendu dans tous les temps aux peintres, aux poètes, aux écrivains distingués, les hommages les plus éclatans ...²³

In De la littérature she had ranked climate as a prime de-

terminant of the aesthetic sensibilities of the nations of the South, suggesting a connection between beneficent natural surroundings and a sensual and external concept of beauty. Mme. de Staël assigned less importance to physical determinants in the Corinne, where she offered a broader socio-political explanation for the predominance of the imaginative over the philosophical element in Italian art. She related the failure of philosophical reason to the absence of free political institutions, capable of instilling a practical concern for the general welfare. Through Ostwald, Mme. de Staël criticized the Italians' unphilosophical style of thought; while through Corinne, she espoused the view that each national culture possessed intrinsic merit and proclaimed the value of aesthetic pluralism:

J'ai de la peine à croire ... qu'il fut désirable pour le monde entière de perdre toute couleur nationale, toute originalité de sentimens et d'esprit ...²⁴

Mme. de Staël confined her examination of Italian literature to the genres of poetry and drama. She complained of the superficiality of Italian prose, alluding to its non-utilitarian character. As she did not apply this criterion to the poetic genre, Corinne was permitted to defend Italian poetry as "une merveille d'imagination,"²⁵ excelling in the lyrical depiction of nature. Mme. de Staël's observations of Italian drama were presented in the form of a debate between Corinne and the Count d'Urfeuil, who censured Italian playwrights for failing to observe the tenets of neo-classicism. The dimensions of this confrontation

were political as well as aesthetic, since the neo-classic creed had received the official sanction of Napoleon. Corinne returned to the idea of national-rootedness, distinguishing Italian comedy from both the French comedy of manners and the philosophical satire of the English. She observed that the spontaneity and intensity of Italian passions gave rise to the exaggerated improvisatory characterizations of the commedia dell'arte. Italian tragedy, on the other hand, had been cut off from its national roots. The works of Alfieri, the nation's most celebrated tragedian, displayed an austere and idiosyncratic style, little indebted to his social milieu. To reconcile the genre with Italian sensibilities, she advocated the use of lyric poetry and the introduction of music and choruses, effects which would "augmenter et ... multiplier ... les plaisirs de l'imagination."²⁶ To cultivate indigenous talent, she recommended the establishment of a national theater.

A broader theoretical framework informed Mme. de Staël's discussion of Italian art. The nationalist perspective she had used to assess Italian literature was now supplanted by the more encompassing classic-romantic categories formulated by the Schlegels. She followed their lead by viewing sculpture as a distinctively pagan art form -- plastic, harmonious, composed -- expressing the integral culture of the classical republic. By contrast, painting was a romantic art deriving from Christian sources, and hence closest to the sensibilities of modern man:

La sculpture ne sauroit présenter aux regards qu'une existence énergique et simple, tandis que la peinture indique les mystères du recueillement et de la résignation, et fait parler l'âme immortelle à travers de passagères couleurs ...²⁷

The unique qualities of romantic art were epitomized for Mme. de Staël in the paintings of Raphael, which combined purity of emotion with deep religious conviction. Against this ideal, she criticized the artificially mannered style of Italian art of her day,²⁸ as well as censured the sterile imitation of the ancients.²⁹

By way of conclusion, we may observe that nowhere is the variety and complexity of Mme. de Staël's intellectual perspective more visible than in her treatment of Italian cultural determinants. She hesitated, as Sismond recognized, not only between various aesthetic creeds, but also among diverse aesthetic, political and utilitarian criteria. Hence her aesthetic repudiation of classical models contradicted her politically motivated celebration of ancient republican virtue. Her standard of "romantic art," with its emphasis on "les mystères du recueillement et de la résignation," ill-accommodated with the lyrically sensuous and external quality she thought distinctive to the Italian culture. While her conception of literature as an instrument of practical social reform opposed her view of literature as the unreflective expression of national character.

GERMANY

Unlike the Corinne, with its strained union of literary fiction and socio-political exegesis, De l'Allemagne is a scholarly treatise entirely given over to the comparative study of German and French political cultures. Voluminous though tightly structured, it ranks as Mme. de Staël's most ambitious, informed and comprehensive work of comparative analysis. Yet notwithstanding its greater analytical sophistication, De l'Allemagne offers many parallels with the Corinne. Like Italy, Germany had engaged Mme. de Staël's attention relatively late in her career. Her early apathy towards the nation, attested to in a 1796 letter to Henri Meister, reflected the general attitude of her countrymen (Mme. de Staël's disposition is nevertheless surprising, given the efforts of F.M. Grimm and J. Suard, close friends and habitués of Mme. Necker's salon, as well as of Meister to disseminate German culture in France):

Aller à Zurich pour un auteur allemand (she is referring to Wieland) c'est ce que vous ne me verrez pas faire. Je crois savoir déjà tout ce qui se dit en allemand et même cinquante ans de ce qui se dira.¹

In the De la littérature this disposition spawned a superficial treatment of German letters, derived second-hand from a series of articles by Charles Villers in the Hamburg-based journal, Spectateur du Nord. She turned wholeheartedly to the study of German language and culture only in 1800, when her circle widened to include a number of French émigrés newly returned from Germany. Foremost among them were Camille Jordan, translator of Klopstock, and Jean M.

de Gérando, expositer of Kant. Wilhelm von Humboldt tutored her in German, and other members of her coterie included Adreïn de Lézay Marnesia, Charles Chênédollé, and Martin de Vanderbourg. Inspired by this imposing group of Germanophiles, Mme. de Staël had, by 1802, become an ardent admirer of German culture. Thus she wrote to Villers:

Je crois avec vous que l'esprit humain qui semble voyager d'un pays a l'autre est en ce moment en Allemagne. J'étudie l'allemand avec soin, sûre que c'est la seulement que je trouverai des pensées nouvelles et des sentiments profonds. ²

I have, in Chapter I, discussed the circumstances and itinerary of Mme. de Staël's trip to Germany in 1803-1804 and her return in 1807-1808. A few words must now be said about the chronology of De l'Allemagne, as well as about Mme. de Staël's mode of research. Mme. de Staël formally declared her intention to write De l'Allemagne (then referred to as Lettres sur l'Allemagne) in an 1808 letter to the Prince de Ligne which already contained the outline of the work.³ The treatise was, in fact, drafted over a period of seven years, though its chapters were composed out of sequence. Thus the opening chapters of Section I ("De l'Allemagne et des moeurs des allemands") drew on Mme. de Staël's carnets of 1803; her chapters on Austria and Vienna, on her 1808 voyage; while the chapters on Berlin, Saxe and Weimer again reflected her observations of 1803-1804. Section II ("La littérature et les arts") appears to have been written in 1809 during a feverish literary interlude at Coppet. Section III ("La philosophie et la morale") was first drafted in 1803-1804, though revised as late as 1813. Section IV

("La religion et l'enthousiasme") dates from 1809-1810.⁴ The manuscript (save for passages added to the 1813 edition of the work) was completed in 1810, and its proofs submitted to the censor. Following intricate machinations by Mme. de Staël, her publisher Nicolle, and the French government, the work was confiscated on direct order of Napoleon. It was finally published in England in 1813, prefaced by an 1810 letter from Napoleon's Minister of Police, General Savary, Duke of Rovigo, alluding to the seizure of the manuscript and proofs, and ordering its authoress into exile.

Much of De l'Allemagne is impressionistic, registering Mme. de Staël's personal observations as recorded in her Carnets de voyage. Certain passages dealing with German habits and customs were, in fact, taken directly from the Carnets with little or no revision. In other cases, Mme. de Staël deliberately modified her original observations in order to convey a more congenial picture of German life. Thus the episode portrayed in the Carnets as,

En arrivant dans la chambre de cet homme, j'ai failli tomber à la renverse par l'odeur de la pipe; des vêtements de laine chauffoient sur un poêle brûlant ... Tout à coup non seulement la maîtresse, mais le maître (the piano) ... En peu d'instants, j'avois oublié le cadre de cette scène, et j'étois toute à mes pensées.⁵

was rendered idyllic in the De l'Allemagne,

il m'est arrivé d'entrer dans de pauvres maisons noircies par la fumée de tabac, et d'entendre tout à coup non seulement la maîtresse, mais le maître du logis, improviser sur le clavecin, comme les Italiens improviser en vers.⁶

For her discussions of German philosophy and literature, Mme. de Staël relied on her first-hand knowledge of the

texts, the teachings of Henry Crabb Robinson, Villers and Schlegel, and, when possible, conversations with the authors. Many of the dramatic works examined in the treatise were staged at Coppet, and their merits debated by members of her circle. Certain of these thinkers, notably Schlegel, can be seen to have influenced her views, though rarely does Mme. de Staël accept the teachings of her mentors uncritically.

No less than Corinne, De l'Allemagne was intended to serve Mme. de Staël's practical political ends and, from this view, the resemblances between the works are striking. Both books openly defied Napoleon's intellectual quarantine of France (interestingly, both used the "Great Wall of China" as a metaphor with which to characterize Napoleon's suppression of new ideas from abroad) and both suggested an invidious comparison between the stagnant despotic culture of France and a flourishing and dynamic alien culture. (In an earlier De Germania, Tacitus had similarly compared the vigor of the Germanic tribes with the decadence of imperial Rome.) Both works focused on historically fragmented nations which, under Napoleon, were being forged into unified and centralized political states. While Mme. de Staël welcomed the political unification of Italy and Germany, she desired it accomplished through national initiatives rather than imposed by alien rule. Like the Corinne, De l'Allemagne was written to awaken a consciousness of national identity and thereby incite rebellion against French hegemony. By joining these goals, Mme. de Staël opposed the views of German intellectuals like Hegel and Fichte who defended

French rule precisely on the grounds that it was instrumental in the formation of a modern German state. Thus she welcomed the Wars of Liberation of 1813, though repudiated the aggressive nationalism later professed by Schlegel. As evidenced by her painstaking efforts to promote cultural exchange among the nations of Europe, Mme. de Staël's nationalism was never entirely severed from eighteenth century cosmopolitan ideals. Lastly, De l'Allemagne took up the related question of the failure of German public spirit: like Italy, Germany was characterized by a divorce between politics and intelligence,⁷ although diverse national determinants channeled the talents of the former into the fine arts and the latter into metaphysical philosophy. Again, Mme. de Staël proposed as a remedy the adoption of a liberal constitution designed to guarantee civil liberties as well as generate a commitment to civic life. However she did not, as in the Corinne, use historical myth as a basis of her polemics (although it did figure in her interpretation of German aesthetics). This point is especially curious, since in the Considérations she would appeal for French liberties in the name of the ancient Frankish constitution introduced into Gaul.

Appropriating Montesquieu's methodology, Mme. de Staël singled out "enthusiasm" as the distinctive principle, or animating sentiment, of the German nation. Her discussion of enthusiasm occupies the concluding chapters of the work, the preceding chapters having explored the various political, social and intellectual determinants

which contributed to sustain it. Her understanding of the concept ultimately derived from Shaftesbury⁸ who had exerted a profound influence on German thought. By enthusiasm, Mme. de Staël meant a divinely inspired elevation of the soul associated with the apprehension of the sublime and the beautiful; its essence was emotional and instinctive, though it was controlled by reason.⁹ This characteristic served to distinguish enthusiasm from fanaticism, an unregulated passion directed towards narrow sectarian ends. By contrast, enthusiasm was a source of creative energy, as well as of disinterested virtue and felicity:

... l'enthousiasme se rallie à l'harmonie universelle: c'est l'amour de beau, l'élévation de l'âme, la jouissance du dévouement, réunis dans un même sentiment qui a de la grandeur et du calme. Tout ce qui nous porte à sacrifier notre propre bien être ou notre propre vie est presque toujours de l'enthousiasme...¹⁰

Yet Mme. de Staël also recognized that enthusiasm could lead men to minimize the importance of practical social and political ties; to identify one's self completely with the eternal order was to retreat from the exigencies of the present. Enthusiasm had to be reconciled with character, "feeling free" (realizable through contemplation) had to be reconciled with "being free" (realizable only through positive social commitment): Of the Germans she wrote:

... aucune nation n'est plus capable de sentir et de penser; mais quand le moment de prendre un parti est arrivé, l'étendu même de conceptions nuit à la décision de caractère. Le caractère et l'enthousiasme différent a beaucoup d'égards; il faut choisir son but par l'enthousiasme, mais l'on doit y marcher par le caractère; la pensée n'est rien sans l'enthousiasme, ni l'action sans le caractère; l'enthousiasme est tout pour les nations littéraires; le caractère est

tout pour les nations agissantes: les nations libres ont besoin de l'un et de l'autre. 11

Mme. de Staël classified Germany as an "independent" as against a "free" state. By German "independence" she referred to a lack on interference by the government in the private endeavors of its subjects; domestic life, scholarly activities, commerical enterprise and religious worship were all carried on in an atmosphere of toleration and minimal governmental intrusions. However the basis of this independence was not the presence of constitutional guarantees, but rather the efficacy of internalized norms on the rulers and the population (a situation analogous to that of Italy). Princes displayed a moderate temperament and exercised a high degree of self control; the German people possessed an equitable and methodical character. This unbounded independence of private endeavor was coupled with strict social regimentation and unquestioned obedience to political command. But unlike the fear-inspired obedience of the despotic subject, the submissiveness of the Germans: in public matters derived from the regularity of their temperament and the impersonal character of political power:

... ce n'est pas servilité, c'est régularité chez eux que l'obéissance; ils sont scrupuleux dans l'accomplissement des ordres qu'ils reçoivent, comme si tout ordre était un devoir ...¹²

Despite the outwardly martial trappings of society, the Germans lacked military spirit:

Il n'est point d'assemblage plus bizarre que l'aspect guerrier de l'Allemagne entière, les soldats que l'on rencontre à chaque pas, et le genre de vie casanier qu'on y mène ...¹³

Mme. de Staël contrasted German independence with freedom, as modeled on her concept of a liberal political society. A free nation was characterized by constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties, a decentralized structure of political power, broad political participation and a government responsive to public opinion; it displayed a military spirit generated by public virtue. While independence could be sustained even in the face of political complacency, liberty required constant public vigilance:

L'indépendance même dont on jouissait en Allemagne, sous presque tous les rapports, rendait les Allemands indifférents à la liberté; l'indépendance est un bien, la liberté une garantie: et précisément parce que personne n'était froissé en Allemagne, ni dans ses droits, ni dans ses jouissances, on ne sentait pas le besoin d'un ordre de choses qui maintint ce bonheur ...¹⁴

Mme. de Staël's argument holds interest for at least two reasons. First, despite her explicit renunciation of the ethic of self-interest in De l'Allemagne (to be considered below), her case for liberty rested upon the defensive self-interested posture of the citizen. Her earlier efforts to reconcile self-interest with civic humanism were thus carried over into De l'Allemagne, although the tensions in her political perspective were now compounded by her attempted integration of the other-worldly sentiment of enthusiasm. Second, the argument offers evidence of Mme. de Staël's high estimation of civic virtue, despite the fact that it appears to be premised on a negative view of the political. For according to such a view, Germany's situation could well be considered ideal: citizens need not expend the effort to

participate in public life due to the efficacy of internalized norms on the leadership and the population. Yet Mme. de Staël clearly disapproved of this arrangement although it effectively provided for the orderly functioning of society and the protection of privacy. As corroborated by the following passage from De l'Allemagne, Mme. de Staël never abandoned her emphasis on the intrinsic moral value of political participation:

L'éducation intellectuelle est parfaite en Allemagne, mais tout s'y passe en théorie; l'éducation pratique dépend uniquement des affaires; c'est par l'action seule que le caractère acquiert la fermeté nécessaire pour se guider dans la conduite de la vie ... Les gouvernements sont les vrais instituteurs des peuples; et l'éducation publique elle-même, quelque bonne qu'elle soit, peut former des hommes de lettres, mais non des citoyens, des guerriers, ni des hommes d'État.¹⁵

As in Italy, the very weakness of the political sphere contributed to the distinctive character of the Germans, accounting for their lack of practical wisdom and national resolve. Nor did social convention figure as a positive determinant of behavior. The absence of a capital city deprived Germany of a center of fashion and manners whose influence would radiate throughout the nation.¹⁶ Although social classes were sharply differentiated and formalities strictly observed, the Germans accepted this manner of society with indifference:

... cette démarcation (of classes) n'a dans le fait rien d'offensant ... les différences de rang se réduisent à quelques privilèges de cour, à quelques assemblées qui ne donnent pas assez de plaisir pour mériter de grands regrets. Rien n'est amer, dans quelque rapport que ce puisse être, lorsque la société ... a peu de puissance...¹⁷

The Germans preferred domestic life to social gatherings: the manners were unrefined and often crude; their conversation, tiresome and pedantic. Even the German language was ill-suited to spirited social repartée:

L'allemand se prête beaucoup moins à la précision et à la rapidité de la conversation. Par la nature même de sa construction grammaticale le sens n'est ordinairement compris qu'à la fin de la phrase. 18

The predominance of spirituality over practicality was distinctive to Germany, and accordingly the major portion of De l'Allemagne was devoted to the realm of the mind. As opposed to the formally regimented socio-political order, the realm of ideas brooked no limitations; the talent of the Germans channeled into unbounded creativity. Throughout the treatise Mme. de Staël drew tendentious comparisons between the efflorescent intellectual life of Germany and the ossified culture of France. Whereas the French submitted to the aesthetic rule of neo-classicism and espoused a dehumanizing materialist philosophy, the Germans had entered the age of romanticism and predicated their philosophy on man's moral dignity. Yet despite her genuine admiration for the German culture of the polemical intent of her treatise, Mme. de Staël never regarded the two nations in Manichean terms. Her praise of German cultural achievements, while often lavish, fell far short of uncritical adulation.

Religion figured prominently as a determinant of German attitudes and creative achievements. Germany's religious pluralism, while detrimental to the creation of a unified national spirit, promoted attitudes of tolerance

and restraint. Even Catholicism exhibited an unaccustomed tolerance towards other faiths. However Protestantism, the nation's predominant religion, proved more conducive to enlightenment and philosophical pursuits.¹⁹ (Interestingly, Mme. de Staël had earlier encouraged Charles Villers to compose the Essai sur la Reformation de Luther (1804), which attributed Germany's comparatively large number of universities to the influence of Protestantism.)²⁰ Despite the diversity of Germany's religious sects -- Mme. de Staël described numerous cults, including several varieties of mysticism -- all shared a common basis in enthusiasm, that sentiment which linked the human mind to the sublime beauty of nature. Enthusiasm contributed to mutual toleration among religious sects, but also led to the deprecation of all worldly interests. Religious contraversies, being exclusively confined to the realm of abstraction, failed to engage men's passions or incite mass movements.²¹

Abstraction was also the distinguishing characteristic of German philosophy, a topic which occupies Part III of De l'Allemagne. I shall not here relate Mme. de Staël's extensive discussions of individual philosophers, but rather focus on her examination of the general properties of German philosophy and its interrelationship with other spheres of German life. Mme. de Staël perceived a continuity in German philosophy dating from the works of Leibniz: its common attributes she identified as abstraction, formalism, universalism and idealism. Its ethical teachings conveyed

the essential dignity of human beings as rooted in free will and moral obligation. Throughout her exposition, Mme. de Staël stressed the relation of this style of philosophy to its social context. The Germans low valuation of civic life corresponded to the abstract contemplative quality of their philosophy. To the extent that the German engaged in political thinking, he preferred to discourse on the abstract essence of the state than to confront the exigencies of practical politics. In the social realm, the absence of social pressures compelling conformity was congruent with a philosophy based on the assumption of moral autonomy. Against this mode of philosophizing stood the French tradition, rooted in a sensationalist epistemology and an ethic of self-interest. Never before had Mme. de Staël denounced psychological hedonism so vehemently as in this comparison of the two philosophical traditions. Correspondingly, her earlier faith in the potentialities of a positivist social calculus now appeared irrevocably shaken:

L'univers ressemble plus à une poème qu'à une machine; et s'il fallait choisir, pour le concevoir, de l'imagination ou de l'esprit mathématique, l'imagination approcherait davantage de la vérité. 22

Nevertheless Mme. de Staël's position in De l'Allemagne does not, as some commentators have assumed,²³ represent a fundamental break in her thought, but rather a continuation of the tensions already present in her earlier writings. First, she had always oscillated between repudiating and invoking an ethic of self-interest. Thus Des circonstances actuelles, her most consistently utilitarian work, cau-

tioned against "certains metaphysiciens moralistes qui ... veulent que tout derive ... de l'intérêt."²⁴ While De l'Allemagne, her most resolutely anti-utilitarian work, pleaded for a constitutional German state by appealing to the motive of selfish interest. Second, her arguments against utilitarianism had since her adolescent essay on Rousseau consistantly derived from an ethic of natural virtue. De l'Allemagne evidenced no departure from this position. Thus while Mme. de Staël praised German philosophers (as exemplified by Kant) for their recognition of human dignity, she rebelled against the severity of an ethic rooted in the opposition of inclination and duty:

La théorie de Kant en morale est sévère et quelque fois sèche, parce qu'elle exclut la sensibilité ... il n'admet pas cette sensibilité pour guide ... et place le morale sous la sauvegarde de principes immuables, Il n'est rien plus sévère que cette doctrine.²⁵

As described by Mme. de Staël, Germany's aesthetic culture better accorded with its animating sentiment of enthusiasm than did its stringent moral code. For Germany was the birthplace of romanticism, the movement which broke the fetters of neo-classicism. The two aesthetic creeds were identified by Mme. de Staël in terms first expounded by A.W. Schlegel:²⁶ neo-classicism derived inspiration from the ancients and embodied a formal and imitative theory of art; romanticism had national roots, was drawn from Christian and medieval sources, rejected rules and genres, and exhalted creative genius and imagination.

Mme. de Staël's exposition of the Schlegelian dichotomy ushered in the classic-romantic literary debate soon to rage through England and the Continent. Her own position on the relative merits of the two creeds was not unambiguous. Although she proclaimed the superiority of romanticism as the only authentic expression of the modern ethos, she could not entirely abandon the teachings of classicism which frequently led her to repudiate German "extravagance" and "bad taste." This tension was further compounded by her continued adherence to a theory of literary utility, according to which literature was judged in terms of its socially useful effects. Whereas romanticism shared certain traits in common with Mme. de Staël's conception of socially useful art (its association with Christian humanism, for example) and could be enlisted to serve her practical political ends (to feul German nationalism), its was in essence an anti-utilitarian creed, and hence irreconcilable with her general view of progress.

While it remains beyond the scope of this study to examine in detail the literary theories set out in De l'Allemagne, it is appropriate to note the relation between Germany's aesthetic initiatives and national character: the religious temper of the nation, its spirit of toleration and solicitude of genius (social pressures to conform being minimal), its preference for intellectual over practical freedom all contributed to the indigenious growth of romanticism. Historical causes also figured prominently

in its development:

La littérature allemande n'a point eu ce qu'on a coutume d'appeler un siècle d'or, c'est à dire une époque où les progrès des lettres sont encouragés par des chefs de l'Etat ... Peut-être la littérature a-t-elle dû à cet isolement comme à cette indépendance plus d'originalité et d'énergie.²⁷

The various forms of German literature bore the imprint of romanticism. German tragedy was linked to Christian humanism rather than pagan fatalism; its subject matter was drawn from history rather than myth; its plots pivoted on character rather than event.²⁸ Comedy tended to broad farce rather than social satire, incorporating forms of fancy and caprice "sans frein et sans but determine."²⁹ Poetry was improvisational, an expression of infinite longing as opposed to temporal happiness.³⁰ Novels were richly imaginative and embraced a variety of types: the domestic, supernatural, philosophical and epic.³¹ Only in the realm of art and music did the Germans' propensity to intellectual abstraction stifle aesthetic creativity:

Les Allemands en général conçoivent mieux l'art qu'ils ne mettent en pratique; à peine ont-ils une impression, qu'ils tirent une foule d'idées... c'est un grand inconvénient, surtout pour les arts, où tout est sensation; ils sont analysés avant d'être sentis ...³²

RUSSIA:

For Mme. de Staël's profile of Russia, I turn to her posthumous memoirs, the Dix années d'exil, which record her travels through that nation in 1812. The image of Russia projected in its pages, while a product of Mme. de Staël's direct observations and experiences, was shaped by political circumstances and indebted to the earlier insights of the philosophes. Although the Dix années d'exil was not intended as a political tract (Mme. de Staël's son, Auguste, recounts that she entertained no thoughts of publishing it as a pièce d'occasion),¹ the sections of the work pertaining to Russia were drafted in the wake of the French invasion and directly reflect Mme. de Staël's Manichean view of the 1812 War. Her sympathetic observations of Russian life were influenced in no small measure by her perception of Russia as the instrument of Napoleon's defeat. She applauded Russia's primitive martial vigor, yet recognized it to be incompatible with the spirit of a free society; she admired Czar Alexander, yet acknowledged his power to be "despotic." Thus immediate political considerations did not entirely numb Mme. de Staël's critical capacities and ultimately, as with her treatment of Italy and Germany, a free society remained the standard by which Russia was to be judged. With Napoleon's impending demise, her paeans to Russian military prowess gave way to expressions of horror over the occupation of Paris by Cossack barbarians. She wrote to Constant in 1814:

Vous n'êtes pas Français, Benjamin -- Tous les souvenirs de votre enfance ne sont attachés à cette terre -- voilà

d'où vient la différence entre vous et moi -- mais pouvez-vous vraiment désirer voir les cosaques dans la rue Racine? ²

Mme. de Staël traveled to Russia with the intellectual baggage of the Enlightenment. Russia loomed large in the thought of the philosophes, and their writings did much to shape Mme. de Staël's perspectives. French interest in Russia dated only from the early eighteenth century. Prior to the visit of Peter the Great in 1717, it had been dismissed by French thinkers as an Oriental land of barbaric savagery. So greatly, however, did Peter impress his French hosts as a ruler of enlightened principles that he single-handedly effected the transformation of the prevailing image of Russia. Fontenelle's rhapsodic Éloge funèbre de Pierre le Grand delivered in 1725, indicated that Russia had not only entered into the French consciousness, but commanded enthusiastic attention as an experiment in the potentialities of legislative reform. Subsequent debate over the Russian example centered on the figure of Peter as the "Great Legislator," "Enlightened Monarch," or "Despot." At issue was the nature and legitimacy of Peter's mode of rule, as well as the character and malleability of the Russian nation. With Catherine's accession to the throne, these questions were taken up with renewed vigor.

The image of Russia held by the philosophes splintered along a broad spectrum. For Voltaire, a domestic exponent of the thèse royale, Peter had successfully transcended his environment and, through the mechanism of absolutist rule, laid the foundations of a civilized Russian nation. Vol-

taire's lavish appraisal of the Czar is epitomized by his entry on "Russia" in the Dictionnaire philosophique, "Voir Pierre le Grand." As for Catherine, Voltaire esteemed her Peter's worthy successor. Among those who eulogized Peter's reign, there remained disagreement as to the extent of his accomplishments. Whereas Voltaire maintained that the Czar had fulfilled his civilizing mission ("Aujourd'hui les Russes ne sont plus surpris de leurs progrès; ils se sont, en moins de cinquante ans familiarisés avec tous les arts ..."),³ others, like d'Argens, contended that the Russian character was too primitive and Peter's reign too short to realize profound transformations:

Le tsar est mort trop tôt pour le bonheur de ses peuples.. malgré les soins que l'on a pris depuis plusieurs années de cultiver leur génie, le peuple est le moins poli et le moins spirituel de l'Europe ...⁴

Montesquieu, a proponent of the thèse nobiliare, looked with less favor upon Peter's absolutist methods. The Czar had, in Montesquieu's view, illegitimately sought to change by means of legal sanction modes of behavior properly governed by custom:

La loi qui obligeait les Moscovites à se faire couper la barbe et les habits, et la violence de Pierre 1^{er}, qui faisait tailler jusqu'aux genoux les longues robes de ceux qui entraient dans les villes, étaient tyranniques. Il y a des moyens pour empêcher les crimes: ce sont les peines; il y en a pour faire changer les manières: ce sont les exemples ...⁵

Nor was the condition of the Russian nation so primitive as to warrant such acts of despotism:

La facilité et la promptitude avec laquelle cette nation s'est policée a bien montré que ce prince avait trop mauvaise opinion d'elle, et que ces peuples

n'étaient pas des bêtes, comme on le disait. Les moyens violents qu'il employa étaient inutiles; il serait arrivé tout de même à son but par la douceur.⁶

Rousseau criticized the Czar on other grounds. As a legislator, Rousseau argued in the Contrat social, Peter was guilty of two fundamental errors: first, by telescoping the process of modernization, he imposed the trappings of civilization on his people prematurely; second, by importing the cultures of neighboring states, he failed to develop the distinctive genius of the Russian nation. Rousseau predicted that as a consequence of these policies the Russians would remain permanently incapable of civilized life, and ultimately fall prey to barbarian hordes.⁷

Diderot's attention was directed to the Russia of Catherine the Great. His visit to Russia in 1773 at the invitation of the Empress dealt a lethal blow to his ambitions for translating Catherine's professed liberal convictions into constitutional practice. In the Observations sur le Nakaz (1774), Diderot censured Catherine for her refusal to be bound by law, to decentralize her powers, or to recognize the rights of her subjects. Unmasking her as a "despot," he ridiculed her pretensions as a "monarch:"

Je vois dans l'Instruction de Sa Majesté Imperiale un projet d'un code excellent; mais pas un mot sur le moyen d'assurer le stabilité de ce code. J'y vois le nom de despote abdiqué; mais la chose conservée, mais le despotisme appelle monarchie.⁸

Despite Diderot's expressed desire to present a balanced appraisal of the Russian character,⁹ his observations were generally less than flattering. In his correspondence with Mme. Necker as well as in the Entretiens avec Catherine II,

Diderot depicted the Russians as given to dissimulation and prone to fits of "terreur panique,"¹⁰ traits he attributed to long subjugation to despotic rule. Other observers, however, were not as harsh in their conclusions. La Messelière, a French diplomat whose celebrated Voyage à Petersbourg was published in 1803, emphasized the "élévation d'âme" of the Russian people, lauded their hospitality, and spoke with awe of the magnificence of their ceremonials.¹¹ La Messelière's observations were later echoed by Mme. de Staël, who explicitly rebuked Diderot for his one-sided portrayal of the Russian character.¹²

As I shall attempt to show, Mme. de Staël's own profile of Russia took into account the various conflicting assessments of her predecessors. She classified Russia as a despotism, but distinguished it from Western varieties of that political type. It had been customary to associate Russia with the Orient rather than Europe, and Mme. de Staël did not take exception to that practice.¹³ With Voltaire, she pointed to the primitive conditions which dictated the need for strong centralized rule:

L'énergie et la grandeur sont dans la nation; mais l'ordre et les lumières manquent souvent encore, soit dans son gouvernement, soit dans la conduite privée des individus. Pierre 1^{er}, en rendant européenne la Russie, lui donna sûrement de grands avantages par l'établissement d'un despotisme que son père avait préparé, et qui a été consolidé par lui.¹⁴

However Mme. de Staël's capitulation to relativist standards was not complete. As a disciple of Montesquieu, she could not resist a sinister comparison of Peter I and Richelieu:

Pierre I, quoique à beaucoup d'égards il ait fait un bien infini à la Russie, abaissa les grands, et réunit sur sa tête le pouvoir temporel et le pouvoir spirituel, afin de ne pas rencontrer d'obstacles à ses desseins. Richelieu a conduisiat de même en France ...¹⁵

This constitutionalist posture also accounted for her praise of Catherine's initiatives to liberalize the institutions of government,¹⁶ despite the fact that Peter had not completed his task of civilizing the nation and centralized rule remained a continuing necessity. As for Czar Alexander, Mme. de Staël ranked him a "Great Legislator," who would utilize his extensive powers to lay the foundations of a constitutional state:

Si les circonstances politiques de l'Europe ramenaient la paix ... on verrait Alexandre uniquement occupé d'améliorer son pays, chercher lui-même quelles sont les lois qui pourraient garantir à la Russie le bonheur dont elle ne peut être assurée que pendant la vie de son maître actuel. ¹⁷

Thus seen, the historical character of the Russian despotism was heterogeneous. Nonetheless, the reigns of Peter, Catherine and Alexander shared a common principle: all ruled over willing subjects in the general interest. To develop this point, Mme. de Staël recalled the original Greek meaning of the despot as master over slaves:

... cet esclavage de Russie ne ressemble pas pour ses effets à celui dont nous nous faisons l'idée dans l'Occident: ce ne sont point, comme sous le régime féodale, des vanqueurs qui ont imposé de dures lois aux vaincus; les rapports des grands avec le peuple ressemblent plutôt à ce qu'on appelait la famille des esclaves chez les anciens, qu'à l'état des serfs chez les modernes. ¹⁸

Although Mme. de Staël repudiated the Greek view that a people could be slaves by nature, she reluctantly conceded

that absolutist rule may be requisite to elevate them from an abject state.

If this concession placed Mme. de Staël in the camp of Voltaire, she did not for long stray from Montesquieu's fold. Shifting her perspective, she reassumed a skeptical attitude towards absolute power, and focused on the circumstances which operated to curb it. Of these, she emphasized two: the vastness of the Russian territory¹⁹ and the in-nately moderate disposition of its rulers.²⁰ Religion, to the contrary, enhanced rather than checked the exercise of power:

... en effect, le culte grec, en excluant l'empire du pape, donne au souverain de la Russie les pouvoirs spirituels et temporels tout ensemble ...²¹

And like Diderot, she alluded to the noxious effects of despotism on the Russian character, thereby tacitly acknowledging the inadequacy of physical and social restraints:

... les Russes, comme tous les peuples soumis au despotisme, sont plus capables de dissimulation que de réflexion²² ... peut-être que l'extrême prudence à laquelle un gouvernement despotique accoutume, fait que les Russes sont charmés de n'être point exposés, par l'entraînement de la conversation, à parler sur des sujets qui puissent avoir une conséquence quelconque ...²³

In the final analysis, Mme. de Staël's image of Russian despotism alternated inconsistently between the enlightened absolutism of Voltaire's portrait and the arbitrary absolutism depicted by Montesquieu: the one, suited to the task of modernization; the other, fitted only to further debase the Russian nation.

Mme. de Staël designated military spirit as the ani-

mating passion of the Russian nation.²⁴ This observation owed as much to practical political imperatives, as it did to the conceptions of Russian "primitivism" advanced by her predecessors. The image of Russia, massed as a nation and directing its unbridled barbaric energies against the Napoleonic menace, had captured her imagination. From this standpoint, she compared Russia's martial vigor with the public spirit of the English nation.²⁵

While Mme. de Staël's referred to military vigor as Russia's predominant national trait, she also emphasized the complexities of the Russian character: at once melancholic and gay, patient and impetuous, hospitable and treacherous. Earlier commentators on Russia had, in a crudely impressionistic style, presented similar findings. Mme. de Staël, however, brought her training in Montesquieu to bear upon her observations, offering a sustained investigation of the physical and moral causes that combined to form the distinctively Russian character type.

The physical circumstances of the nation figured prominently as a determinant of Russia's primitive vigor. Reflecting Montesquieu's thesis on the importance of physical causes to backward societies, Mme. de Staël called attention to the harshness of the Russian terrain and the severity of its climate. Further, the vast expanse of the Russian territory inhibited the easy social interchange that is a necessary condition of enlightenment.²⁶

Of the moral determinants of Russia's distinctive spirit, Mme. de Staël placed much emphasis on social forces.

She called attention to the open character of the Russian elite, distinguishing military achievement as its basis of recruitment. This arrangement Mme. de Staël contrasted favorably with the caste-like exclusiveness of the French aristocracy. The identification of social status with military talent, in turn, profoundly affected the class structure of the nation. Its most important consequence was to inhibit the development of a middle class:

... toute l'ambition des bourgeois est de faire leurs fils officiers, afin qu'ils soient dans la classe privilégiée. De là vient que toute éducation est finie à quinze ans; on se précipite dans l'état militaire le plus tôt possible, et tout le reste est négligé ...²⁷

Mme. de Staël, who never abandoned her conviction that the bourgeoisie was the true vehicle of historical progress, regarded the absence of a middle class as a crucial determinant of Russia's primitivism:

Le tiers-état n'existe pas en Russie; c'est un grand inconvenient ... car c'est d'ordinaire dans cette troisième classe que les lumières se développent ...²⁸

Nor, without the presence of a stable middle class, could domestic society with its attendant liberal values assume an important role in Russian life. Relations between the sexes were characterized by a volatile impetuosity incompatible with lasting attachments. On the other hand, the lack of an intermediary class fostered sympathetic ties between the aristocracy and the people, engendering a sense of social solidarity and tempering the exercise of power. Thus seen, the Russian despotism was sui generis, revealing social arrangements that bore little resemblance to the fragmented egalitarian social structure Mme. de Staël other-

wise associated with that political type.

The Russian economy combined the extremes of luxury and privation, without accommodating the middling standard of "comfort" associated with the material satisfactions of bourgeois society. In Russia luxury did not afford creature comforts or attest to self-indulgence, but rather reflected a taste for rich display and lavish hospitality. Accordingly, luxury neither constituted a source of corruption nor weakened the military spirit of the nation. Its distinctively external nature accounted for the facility with which the Russian aristocracy adapted to physical hardship:

Vous ne trouveriez jamais rien d'assez parfait pour satisfaire en tout genre leur imagination; mais quand cette poésie de richesse leur manque, ils boivent l'hydromel, couchent sur une planche ... C'est plutôt comme magnificence qu'ils aiment la fortune, que sous le rapport des plaisirs qu'elle donne; semblables encore en cela aux Orientaux qui exercent l'hospitalité envers les étrangers, les comblent de présents et négligent souvent le bien-être habituel de leur propre vie.²⁹

The primitive conditions of the nation, existing in the absence of a middle class with entrepreneurial initiative and technological skill, were thus experienced by the aristocracy and the people alike.

Education further contributed to maintain Russian military vigor. Universities were staffed by foreigners; the course of instruction interrupted at an early age by military service. As a consequence, the Russians were not adept at abstract thinking, nor did they find pleasure in serious conversation.³⁰

Mme. de Staël's discussion of Russian culture fol-

lowed the path trodden by Rousseau. She questioned the propriety of Peter's efforts to Europeanize Russian culture at the expense of its native character and traditions.³¹ She severely criticized the aping of French literary styles. As in her discussion of Germany and Italy, Mme. de Staël stressed the need to develop a distinctively national culture. In Russia's case, this meant seeking literary inspiration in Greek rather than Latin sources, in folk customs, and in the history of the Czars.³²

* * * *

Nowhere are Mme. de Staël's talents as a political sociologist and polemicist displayed to greater advantage than in the national case studies just examined. Her abilities as a comparatist are revealed by her skillful adaption of Montesquieu's categories of analysis, her mastery of the specialized literature relating to each nation she explored, her insatiable curiosity and capacity for empirical research. Mme. de Staël brought to her enterprise few rigid preconceptions: she stressed that the effects of social determinants vary in relation to distinctive national contexts. Hence while Catholicism contributed to intolerance and authoritarianism in France, it inspired aesthetic and humanitarian sentiments in the Italians; sexual relations were linked in Italy with eroticism, in England with domesticity; intellectual freedom bred genius in philosophy among Germans and in the fine arts among Italians; Russia's luxury fueled rather than sapped her primitive vigor. The pioneering quality of

Mme. de Staël's investigations is also worthy of mention. Notwithstanding the efforts of her predecessors, Mme. de Staël's portraits of Germany and Italy can be credited with having introduced the French public to hitherto unfamiliar cultures. Her image of Russia heralded a period of renewed and sympathetic interest in the nation. Her model of England, while lacking the element of exoticism, contributed much to shape the perspectives of Restoration liberalism.

Mme. de Staël's oscillation between universalist and relativist perspectives has been revealed to be the central tension in her thought. Her theory of historical progress rested on the assumption of the ultimate triumph of free institutions which, being rooted in man's nature, were of universal applicability. Her model of despotism represented the obverse of this universally valid political society. This theoretical approach, nourished by the cosmopolitan ideals of the Enlightenment, vied with an attachment to the relativist perspectives inspired by Montesquieu's sociological method. From this view, Mme. de Staël's apotheosis of free society shifted to the celebration of distinctive national cultures; her homage to "human nature" gave way to an appreciation of "national character." Attentive to the feelings, traditions, and institutions that contributed to form the unique spirit of each nation, Mme. de Staël fed the stream of nineteenth century romantic nationalism. While her delight in the mul-

tiplicity of national cultures and the empirical grounding of her arguments set her apart from that movement's more militant exponents.

The central tension in Mme. de Staël's writings between relativism and universalism was further complicated by various other intellectual perspectives which have been examined within the course of this chapter. Rather than rehearse these themes, I shall conclude with some remarks about the partisan dimension of her theorizing. We have seen that Mme. de Staël's models of free society owed as much to the practical imperatives of consensus-building as to the theoretical tradition which they shared. Her model of despotism served as an ideological weapon as well as an analytical construct. Her celebration of cultural pluralism had the practical purpose of discrediting Napoleon's hegemonic designs. To acquaint her with the partisan uses of comparison, Mme. de Staël had a worthy guide in Montesquieu. Her years of exile, during which she acquired first-hand experience of alternative national cultures, further developed her polemical abilities. In her mature works -- De l'Allemagne, Corinne, Considérations -- Mme. de Staël emerged as a political force of such formidable dimensions as to inspire the popular witticism that in her time there were but "three great powers: England, Russia and Mme. de Staël."

NOTES

I. MME. DE STAËL'S ADAPTATION OF MONTESQUIEU

¹See Esprit, "Avertissement de l'auteur."

²"C'est l'amour de la patrie qui a donné aux histoires grecques et romaines cette noblesse que les notres n'ont pas ..." Montesquieu, Pensée 598, in Oeuvres complètes, ed. by R. Caillois (2vols; Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1949-51), I, p. 1127.

³Esprit, IV, 5.

⁴Raymond Aron, Main Currents in Sociological Thought (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), I, p. 47.

⁵Esprit, V, 6; VI, 15.

⁶Ibid., V, 6.

⁷Ibid., IV, 4.

⁸Ibid., IV, 5.

⁹Ibid., IV, 4.

¹⁰Ibid., VIII, 3.

¹¹Ibid., III, 3.

¹²Ibid., XI, 5.

¹³Pensee 631, Caillois, I, p. 1152.

¹⁴Esprit, VIII, 16.

¹⁵Franz Neumann, The Democratic and Authoritarian State (N.Y.: Free Press, 1964), pp. 131-32.

¹⁶John Flamenatz, Man and Society (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1963), I, pp. 274-82.

¹⁷See Locke's Second Treatise, ch. IV.

¹⁸Esprit, XIX, 14.

¹⁹See chs. VIII and IX.

²⁰See M.J.C. Vile, Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1969), passim.

²¹Esprit, XI, 18.

²²Montesquieu did not formulate a theory of historical progress. His only allusion to the doctrine was a satire of the Querelle des anciens et modernes in the Persian Letters (Letter XXXVI).

²³See Franklin Ford, Robe and Sword (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953).

²⁴On Montesquieu's historical erudition, see Robert Shackleton, Montesquieu: A Critical Biography (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 328-36.

²⁵Esprit, II, 4.

²⁶The expression is Sheldon Wolin's. See his Politics and Vision (Boston: Little, Brown Co., 1960), p. 232.

²⁷Esprit, III, 6.

²⁸Ibid., III, 7.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., III, 5.

³¹Ibid., III, 7.

³²See Melvin Richter, "Introduction" in The Political Theory of Montesquieu (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

³³Esprit, IV, 2, 3; IX, 2.

³⁴Ibid., IV, 2.

³⁵Ibid., III, 10; VI, 4.

³⁶Ibid., IV, 2.

³⁷Ibid., VIII, 7.

³⁸Ibid., V, 11.

³⁹Ibid., V, 9.

⁴⁰Ibid., IV, 2.

⁴¹Ibid., XIX, 15.

⁴²Ibid., VII, 9.

⁴³Montesquieu appeared to suggest that the role of law was more prominent in the monarchy than in the republic. See III, 5. See also Montesquieu's comparison of domestic virtue in the republic and the monarchy: VII, 9, 14.

⁴⁴Esprit, VI, 1.

⁴⁵Montesquieu distinguished between luxury founded on "des besoins réelles" (XIX, 27, as the basis of commerce in England) and luxury founded on "le raffinement de la vanité" as peculiar to the monarchical economy.

⁴⁶Montesquieu appears to be drawing on early merchantilist arguments. For a discussion of the tensions in Montesquieu's economic thought, see J. Cavignac, "Montesquieu et le commerce," in L'academie Montesquieu, Etudes sur Montesquieu (Paris: Archives des lettres modernes, 1970),

⁴⁷Esprit, VIII, 4.

⁴⁸For an examination of the intellectual origins of Montesquieu's concept of despotism, see Melvin Richter, "Despotism," Dictionary of the History of Ideas, 1973, II, pp. 1-17.

⁴⁹See Melvin Richter, "Montesquieu on Comparative and Natural Law." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September, 1973.

⁵⁰Esprit, VIII, 10.

⁵¹Ibid., II, 1.

⁵²Ibid., III, 10; XIX, 12.

⁵³Ibid., III, 10.

⁵⁴Ibid., V, 14.

⁵⁵Ibid., VI, 1.

⁵⁶Ibid., V, 14.

⁵⁷Ibid., XI, 6.

⁵⁸This also held true for Voltaire. See his letter to Richard Rolt, August 1, 1750, cited in Peter Gay, Voltaire's Politics (N.Y.: Random House, 1965), p. 109.

⁵⁹Aubry de la Motraye, Voyages en Europe, Asie et Afrique (1727) cited by F.A. Taylor in his "Introduction" to Voltaire's Lettres philosophiques (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961)

⁶⁰However, for a portrait of England as a corrupt and decaying polity, see d'Argenson, Considérations sur le gouvernement ancien et présent de la France.

⁶¹According to Shackleton, Book XI was not completed until 1743. He dates the composition of Book XIX as either 1746 or 1747.

⁶²Pensée 238, Caillois, II, p. 1048-9.

⁶³Pensée 1795, Ibid., I, pp. 1429-30.

⁶⁴Esprit, II, 4.

⁶⁵Ibid., XIX, 27.

⁶⁶Ibid., V, 19.

⁶⁷See Shackleton, Montesquieu, pp. 287-8.

⁶⁸Esprit, XI, 4, 5.

⁶⁹On this point, see Isaac Kraminck, Bolingbroke and his Circle (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), ch. VI.

⁷⁰Shackleton, Montesquieu, p. 301.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Vile, Constitutionalism, p. 87.

⁷³Although for his initial definition of executive power, Montesquieu clearly followed Locke. See Vile, p. 86.

⁷⁴Esprit, XI, 6.

⁷⁵Bolingbroke was ambiguous on this point: for Shackleton, he was the first to enunciate the separation of powers doctrine; for Kraminck, he did not deviate from the traditional theory of the mixed state.

⁷⁶Esprit, XI, 6.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., Book XIX, 27.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 "Pour conserver sa liberté, elle emprunterait de ses sujets, qui verraient que son crédit serait perdu si elle était conquise, auraient un nouveau motif de faire des efforts pour défendre sa liberté." Ibid. Although Montesquieu's remarks referred to England's foreign policy, they are equally applicable to her domestic politics.

89 Ibid., XIX, 27

90 Ibid.

91 Montesquieu ignored the problem of "rotten boroughs."

92 Esprit, XIX, 27.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 De l'Allemagne, I, pp. 21-2.

96 Littérature, p. 367.

97 See below, pp. 272-300.

98 Littérature, p. 369.

99 Ibid., p. 426-27.

100 Benjamin Constant, Principes de politique in Oeuvres, ed. by A. Roulin (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957), p. 1073.

101 See below, pp. 232-3.

102 Des circonstances, p. 97.

103 See Woloch, Jacobin Legacy, p. 157.

104 Mme. de Staël, "Quelques réflexions sur le but moral de Delphine," in Oeuvres complètes, 1844 ed., VII, pp. 336-37.

105 Ibid., p. 341.

- 106 Des circonstances, p. 13.
- 107 Ibid., p. 131.
- 108 Ibid., p. 9.
- 109 Considérations, II, pp. 206-07.
- 110 De l'Allemagne, IV, p. 369.
- 111 Réflexions sur la paix intérieure, p. 153.
- 112 Ibid.
- 113 Considérations, II, p. 210.
- 114 De la littérature, p. 416.
- 115 Lettres sur Rousseau, p. 68.
- 116 Des circonstances, p. 13.
- 117 G. Sartori, "Representation: Representational Systems," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1968, XIII, pp. 466-67.
- 118 Jean Roels, La notion de représentation chez Roederer (Heule: U.G.A., 1968), p. 180.
- 119 Des circonstances, p. 16.
- 120 See Paul Bastid, Sieyès et sa pensée (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1970), p. 379.
- 121 Des circonstances, p. 173.
- 122 Ibid., p. 16.
- 123 Ibid., p. 18.
- 124 Ibid., p. 16.
- 125 See Hanna Pitkin, The Concept of Representation (Calif.: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 84-86.
- 126 Des circonstances, p. 18.
- 127 Ibid., p. 5.
- 128 See his entry, "Droit naturel," in the Encyclopedie.
- 129 See his Contrat social.
- 130 For example, Steven Golin. See below, p. 298.

- 131Palmer, "Public Opinion."
- 132Ibid., p. 328.
- 133Cited by Palmer, Ibid., p. 240.
- 134Jacques Necker, De la Révolution française (Paris: Maret, 1797), pp. 5-6.
- 135Des circonstances, p. 94.
- 136Ibid., p. 173
- 137Ibid., p. 174.
- 138Ibid., p. 16.
- 140Ibid., p. 73.
- 141Ibid., p. 198.
- 142Ibid., pp. 189-90.
- 143Passions, p. 28.
- 144Considérations, II, p. 220.
- 145Des circonstances, pp. 89-90.
- 146Ibid., p. 95.
- 147Considérations, II, p. 234.
- 148Littérature, pp. 559-60.
- 149Julie's union with Wolmar in Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse exemplified Mme. de Staël's conception of a "dutiful" marriage. See her Lettres sur Rousseau.
- 150Delphine, p. 110.
- 151Corinne in Oeuvres complètes, XIV, 1.
- 152Littérature, p. 459.
- 153Ibid., p. 457.
- 154Des circonstances, p. 11.
- 155For example, Bossy d'Anglas, Discours préliminaire au projet de constitution (1795).
- 156Littérature, p. 455.
- 157Ibid., p. 457.
- 158Considérations, II, p. 232.

II. THERMIDORIAN REPUBLIC

- ¹Réflexions sur la paix intérieure, p. 107.
- ²Ibid., p. 113.
- ³This treatise, which developed many themes first suggested in Des circonstances, required several more years to complete.
- ⁴Des circonstances, p. 242.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 198.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 92.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 93.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 219.
- ⁹Littérature, p. 33.
- ¹⁰Des circonstances, p. 307.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 10.
- ¹²Littérature, p. 457.
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Réflexions sur la paix intérieure, p. 151.
- ¹⁵Des circonstances, pp. 127-28.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 167.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 174.
- ¹⁸J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975).
- ¹⁹See Kramnick, Bolingbroke, pp. 163-69.
- ²⁰Pocock, Moment, p. 446.
- ²¹Ibid., chs. IV and V.
- ²²Alfred Cobban, Aspects, pp. 90-111.
- ²³Georges Lefebvre, The Thermidorians and the Directory (N.Y.: Random House, 1964).
- ²⁴Des circonstances, p. 174.

- 25 Ibid., p. 173.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Starzinger, Middlingness, p. 71.
- 28 Littérature, p. 452.
- 29 Ibid., p. 455.
- 30 Des circonstances, p. 156.
- 31 See ibid., pp. 89-95.
- 32 See below, p. 260.
- 33 Woloch, Jacobin Legacy, pp. 180-85.
- 34 See Nannerl Keohane, "Political Economy in Voltaire and Rousseau," Papers from the annual meeting of the Conference for the Study of Political Thought, Political Theory and Political Economy (University of Toronto, April 1974), p. 14.
- 35 Des circonstances, p. 48.
- 36 See below, p. 376.
- 37 Des circonstances, p. 132.
- 38 Ibid., p. 118.
- 39 Vile, Constitutionalism, pp. 186-87.
- 40 Des circonstances, p. 164.
- 41 See Starzinger, Middlingness, ch. II.
- 42 Des circonstances, p. 131.
- 43 Ibid., p. 11.
- 44 J. Bentham, Fragment on Government (1776).
- 45 Vile, Constitutionalism, pp. 196-98.
- 46 Des circonstances, p. 122.
- 47 Ibid., p. 130.
- 48 Ibid., p. 120. For the details of Sieyès' plan, see Lefebvre, Thermidorians, pp. 183-84.

⁴⁹Des circonstances, p. 181.

⁵⁰Letter to Roederer, June 9, 1795, quoted in D. Bagge, Les idées politiques en France sous la Restauration (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952), p. 64.

⁵¹Des circonstances, p. 180.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 130-31.

⁵³Ibid., p. 169.

⁵⁴See Burton Pollin's "Introduction" to William Godwin, De la justice politique, trans. by B. Constant, ed. by Burton Pollin (N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1972).

⁵⁵Littérature, p. 434.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 442.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 467-68.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 470.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 213-14.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 214.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 212-13.

⁶²Ibid., p. 222.

⁶³Ibid., p. 223.

⁶⁴Esprit, XXIV, 5.

⁶⁵See Melvin Richter, "The Uses of Theory: Tocqueville's Adaption of Montesquieu," in Essays in Theory and History (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

⁶⁶For example, D. Laurenson and A. Swingewood, The Sociology of Literature (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1972), pp. 25-28.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 59.

⁶⁸Littérature, p. 65.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 392.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 27.

⁷¹Des circonstances, p. 97.

⁷²See J. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray, The Press in the French Revolution (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1971), pp. 40-43.

⁷³Des circonstances, p. 103.

⁷⁴See Welleck, Romantic Age, pp. 249-50.

⁷⁵Littérature, pp. 497-98.

⁷⁶Ibid. p. 503.

⁷⁷A variety of forms of bonheur are alluded to in Mme. de Staël's writings. She identified the bonheur of melancholy with man's meditative nature, identifying it as a mood of sweet sadness. Thus conceived, it was logically incompatible with the utilitarian concept of bonheur also found in her writings. Whereas the latter pivoted on the diametrical opposition of pleasure and pain, melancholic bonheur represented a fusion of the two sensations.

⁷⁸Mme. de Staël, Essai sur les fictions, in Oeuvres complètes, II, pp. 206-07.

⁷⁹See Robert de Luppé, Les idées littéraires de Mme. de Staël et l'héritage des lumières (Paris: J.Vrin, 1969), pp. 96-101.

⁸⁰Littérature, p. 522.

III. ENGLAND

¹On this point, see Acomb, Anglophobia; Gabriel Bonno, La Constitution Britannique devant l'opinion française de Montesquieu à Bonaparte (Paris: Champion, 1932); E. Carcassone, Montesquieu et le problème de la constitution française au XVIII^e siècle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1927).

²The chancellor of Louis XV who curbed the powers of the Parlement of Paris.

³See Acomb, Anglophobia, pp. 13-14.

⁴Ibid., pp. 96-97.

⁵Voltaire, Lettres philosophiques.

⁶For example, Abbé Dubois de Launay, Coup d'oeil sur le gouvernement anglais (1786), cited in Acomb, Anglophobia, pp. 89-90.

⁷Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État? (1789)

⁸On Necker's debt to Montesquieu see Henri Grange, Les idées de Necker (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1974), esp. pp. 335-39.

⁹Jean-Louis Delolme, Constitution de l'Angleterre (1778). See also Grange, Necker, pp. 339-44.

¹⁰J. Necker, Réflexions sur l'égalité, in Oeuvres complètes, X, pp. 291-92.

¹¹Ibid. p. 303.

¹²Ibid., p. 300.

¹³Considérations, II, 159.

¹⁴Kelly, "Liberalism and Aristocracy," p. 512.

¹⁵Considérations, II, p. 159.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 245.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 205.

²⁰Ibid., p. 161.

²¹See Richter, "Uses of Theory."

²²See Acomb, Anglophobia, p. 24.

²³Considérations, II, p. 216.

²⁴For a discussion of the work of Guizot and Constant, see Vile, Constitutionalism, pp. 200-07.

²⁵Considérations, II, p. 211.

²⁶Ibid., p. 210.

²⁷Ibid., I, pp. 236-37.

²⁸Ibid., p. 236.

²⁹Ibid., II, p. 222.

³⁰Ibid., p. 33.

- ³¹Reflexions sur la paix intérieure, p. 123.
- ³²Considérations, I, p. 91.
- ³³See Grange, Necker, pp. 335-39.
- ³⁴Considérations, II, p. 33.
- ³⁵Ibid.
- ³⁶Ibid., I, p. 90.
- ³⁷Ibid., II, p. 209.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 219.
- ³⁹Ibid., pp. 218-19.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 222.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 103.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 105.
- ⁴³Ibid., p. 102.
- ⁴⁴Ibid., p. 103.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 216
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 103.
- ⁴⁷Ibid.
- ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 234.
- ⁴⁹Esprit, XIX, 27.
- ⁵⁰Tocqueville, Old Regime, ch. IX.
- ⁵¹Considérations, II, p. 221.
- ⁵²Ibid., pp. 205-06.
- ⁵³See below,
- ⁵⁴Considérations, II, p. 232.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 207-08.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 208.
- ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 234.

- 58 Ibid., p. 229.
- 59 Ibid., p. 209.
- 60 Ibid., p. 230.
- 61 Richter, "Uses of Theory."
- 62 Considérations, II, p. 205.
- 63 Ibid., p. 239.
- 64 Ibid., p. 243.
- 65 Ibid., p. 237.
- 66 Ibid., pp. 242-43.
- 67 Ibid., p. 242.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid., p. 244.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid., p. 205.
- 72 Ibid., p. 241.
- 73 Ibid., p. 245.
- 74 Ibid., pp. 207-08.
- 75 Ibid., p. 244.
- 76 Richter, "Uses of Theory."
- 77 Considérations, II, p. 230.
- 78 Ibid., p. 204.
- 79 Ibid., I, p. 187.
- 80 Ibid., II, p. 230.
- 81 Ibid., p. 229.
- 82 Littérature, Part I, ch. XVI.
- 83 Ibid., ch. XV.
- 84 Ibid., p. 316.

⁸⁵Pierre Reboul, Le mythe anglais dans la littérature française sous la Restauration (Lille: Bibliothèque Universitaire de Lille, 1962).

⁸⁶Guido de Ruggiero, The History of European Liberalism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 169.

⁸⁷See Reboul, Mythe, p. 101.

⁸⁸Simonde de Sismondi, Nouveau principes (1826), cited by Reboul, Mythe, p. 226.

⁸⁹Lamartine, Girondists, I, pp. 198-99.

⁹⁰Wolin, Politics, p. 291.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²John Schaar, "Some Ways of Thinking About Equality," The Journal of Politics, XXVI (November 1964), pp. 888-89.

⁹³C.B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 3.

⁹⁴R.P. Wolff, "Beyond Tolerance," in A Critique of Pure Tolerance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 3-52.

⁹⁵Ephraïm Harpaz, L'école Libérale sous la Restauration (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968).

⁹⁶Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1962).

IV. DESPOTISM

¹See Richter, "Despotism."

²See Voltaire's Commentaire sur quelques maximes de l'Esprit des lois (1777).

³Mellon, Political Uses, ch. II.

⁴Considérations, II, p. 287.

⁵Ibid., I, p. 13.

⁶Dix années, p. 45.

⁷Considérations, II, p. 287.

⁸See David Kettler, The Social and Political Thought of Adam Ferguson (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1965), pp. 208-09.

⁹Benjamin Constant, De l'esprit de la conquête et de l'usurpation (1813).

¹⁰Dix années, p. 12.

¹¹Considérations, II, p. 18.

¹²Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. by Henry Reeve (2 vols.; N.Y.: Random House, 1945), II, p.337.

¹³Considérations, II, p. 18.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁵Dix années, p. 39.

¹⁶Considérations, II, p. 56.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 43-44.

²⁰Ibid., Part IV, ch. VIII.

²¹Ibid., p. 76.

²²Ibid., p. 54.

²³Ibid., p. 11.

²⁴Ibid., p. 3.

²⁵Ibid., p. 284.

²⁶Ibid., p. 18.

²⁷Ibid., p. 19.

²⁸Ibid., p. 20.

²⁹Ibid., p. 81.

³⁰Ibid., p. 20.

³¹Dix années, p. 45.

³²Considérations, II, p. 53.

³³On this point, see C.J. Friedrich, M. Curtis and B. Barber, Totalitarianism in Perspective: Three Views (N.Y.: Praeger Publishers, 1969), pp. 3-39.

³⁴G. Sartori, Democratic Theory (N.Y.: Praeger Publishers, 1969), pp. 146-47.

³⁵K. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies (2 vols; N.J.: Princeton University Press), I.

³⁶Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1958), p. 236.

³⁷Considérations, II, p. 44.

³⁸Barber, Totalitarianism, p. 11.

³⁹Friedrich and Curtis, Totalitarianism, pp. 53-116; 123-54.

⁴⁰Considérations, II, p. 75.

⁴¹For example, see Xenophon, Hiero, in Leo Strauss, ed., On Tyranny (N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 10-11.

⁴²Considerations, II, p. 90.

⁴³Dix années, p. 5.

⁴⁴Considérations, II, p. 54.

⁴⁵Dix années, p. 13.

⁴⁶Golin, "Culture as Social Control," pp. 342-59.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 357.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 354-57, passim.

⁴⁹Quoted by Carlo Pellegrini, "Stendhal, Mme. de Staël et Napoleon," Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France, No. 1 (Jan. - Mars 1966), p. 35.

⁵⁰An exception is M. Descotes, La Légende de Napoléon et les écrivains français du XIX^e siècle (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1967).

V. ITALY

¹Quoted in Simone Balayé, "Un article inconnu de Mme. de Staël," Cahiers Staëliens, No. 10 (1970), p. 22.

²Quoted in Simone Balayé, "Mme. de Staël et Sismondi, ou un dialogue critique," Cahiers Staëliens, No. 8 (1969), p. 37.

³Quoted in G. Gennari, Le premier voyage de Mme. de Staël et la genèse de Corinne (Paris: Boivin, 1947), p. 33.

⁴Carnets, p. 100.

⁵Simone Balayé, "Mme. de Staël, Napoleon et l'indépendance italienne," Revue des Sciences Humaines (jan. 1969).

⁶Mme. Necker de Saussure, Notice sur le caractère et les écrits de Mme. de Staël in Mme. de Staël, Oeuvres complètes, I, p. cxl.

⁷While she was of English descent on her mother's side, Corinne's dominant personality traits were "Italian."

⁸Corinne, Oeuvres complètes, VIII, p. 63.

⁹Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 77.

¹¹Balayé, "Mme. de Staël, Napoleon," p. 235.

¹²Littérature, p. 236.

¹³Corinne, VIII, p. 237.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 215-16.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 201.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., pp. 284-85.

²²Ibid., pp. 121-22.

²³Ibid., p. 219.

²⁴Ibid., p. 238.

²⁵Ibid., p. 235.

²⁶Ibid., p. 258.

²⁷Ibid., p. 310.

²⁸Ibid., p. 311.

²⁹Ibid., p. 312.

VI. GERMANY

¹Quoted by Jean de Fange, "Introduction," De l'Allemagne, I, p. xiv.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. xx-xxi.

⁴Ibid., p. xii.

⁵Carnets, p. 35

⁶De l'Allemagne, I, pp. 45-6.

⁷R.R. Palmer in the Age of Democratic Revolution, II, p. 430, attributes this insight to J. Droz, L'Allemagne et la Révolution française (Paris 1949), yet it is clearly anticipated by Mme. de Staël.

⁸See Shaftesbury, "A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm" (1708) in Characteristics.

⁹De l'Allemagne, V, p. 226.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 187-88.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 195-96.

¹²Ibid., pp. 61-2.

¹³Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 59-60.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 244-45.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁹Ibid., V, pp. 25-52, passim.

²⁰See Emma Jaeck, Mme. de Staël and the Spread of German Literature (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1915), p. 28.

²¹De l'Allemagne, V, pp. 139-40.

²²Ibid., IV, pp. 269-70.

²³For example, Gwynne, Mme. de Staël, ch. V; see also E. Ollion, Les idées politiques, morales et pédagogiques de Mme. de Staël (Macon: Protrart freres, 1910).

²⁴Des circonstances, pp. 242-43.

²⁵De l'Allemagne, IV, pp. 324-25.

²⁶On Schlegel's dichotomy and Mme. de Staël, see Rene Wellek, "The Term and Concept of 'Classicism' in Literary History," in Aspects of the Eighteenth Century, E. Wasserman, ed. (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 105-128.

²⁷De l'Allemagne, II, p. 32.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 229-60, passim.

²⁹Ibid., III, p. 179.

³⁰Ibid., II, pp. 141-215, passim.

³¹Ibid., III, pp. 242-90, passim.

³²Ibid., p. 356.

VII RUSSIA

¹"Preface" de M. de Staël fils, Dix années.

²Letter 23 January 1814, de Nolde, p. 65.

³Voltaire, Anecdotes sur le czar Pierre le Grand (1748), in R. Pomeau, Politique de Voltaire (Paris: Armand Colin, 1963), p. 103.

⁴Argens, Lettres Chinoises (1740), quoted in A. Lortholary, Les philosophes du XVIII^e siècle et la Russie (Paris: Bovin, 1951), pp. 31-2.

⁵Esprit, XIX, 14.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Contrat social, Book II, ch.VIII.

⁸Diderot, "Observations sur l'instruction de l'Impératrice de Russie aux députés pour la confection des lois," in Oeuvres politiques, ed. by P. Vernière (Paris: Éditions Garnier, 1963), p. 457.

⁹Diderot, "Entretiens avec Catherine II," Oeuvres politiques, p. 268.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 269. See also Arthur Wilson, Diderot (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 657.

¹¹La Messelière, Voyage à Petersbourg, cited in Dimitri S. von Mohrenschildt, Russia in the Intellectual Life of Eighteenth Century France (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 64.

¹²Dix années, p. 201.

¹³Ibid., 181.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 193.

²⁰Ibid., p. 214.

²¹Ibid., p. 179.

²²Ibid., p. 206.

²³Ibid., p. 225.

²⁴Ibid., p. 202.

²⁵Ibid., pp.189-90.

²⁶Ibid., p. 234.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 217-18.

²⁸Ibid., p. 192.

²⁹Ibid., p. 187.

³⁰Ibid., p. 192.

³¹Ibid., p. 198.

³²Ibid., p. 202.

CHAPTER V:
REVOLUTION

It is hardly surprising that Revolution ranked high among the subjects of Mme. de Staël's interest. Born under the fading years of the Old Regime, she witnessed the transformation and destruction of the Monarchy, the despotism of the Terror, the inauguration of the Thermidorian Republic, the rise and collapse of the Napoleonic Empire, and in her final years, the Bourbon Restoration. This first-hand experience of telescoped historical change informed her entire outlook: "Qui peut vivre, qui peut écrire dans ce temps, et ne pas sentir et penser sur la Révolution de France?"¹ In all of her writings, Mme. de Staël obsessively investigated the nature and causes of revolutionary change. Her most sustained, sophisticated and comprehensive analysis of revolution is to be found in the posthumous treatise Considérations sur la Révolution française, although many of its themes were anticipated in earlier works. Accordingly, I shall take the Considérations as the focus of the present chapter and draw upon Mme. de Staël's other writings to supplement my analysis.

The Considérations is a work of complex intentions. Mme. de Staël originally conceived the treatise as a testament to her father, whose reputation had suffered the scathing invectives of both Jacobins and reactionaries. While the former

denounced Necker's complicity with the Old Regime, the latter branded him a terrorist precursor of Robespierre. In the Considérations Mme. de Staël contested both these charges: her strategy was to depict Necker as a moderate whose acceptance of rational reforms was tempered by a prudent sensitivity to political tradition. Within the course of the treatise she extended this strategy of approach to defend her own revolutionary record. Accordingly, the Considérations must first be examined on an intimate level as Mme. de Staël's personal apologia and final memorial to her father. As I shall observe, this perspective accounted for certain distinctive features of her interpretation of the Revolution. It led her to place a disproportionate emphasis on those phases of the Revolution in which Necker played a leading part, as well as to gloss over those episodes in which her personal involvement would ill-serve her reputation. Moreover it accounted for her focus on the role of individual actors within the context of a theory which explained the events of the Revolution in terms of anonymous social, political and historical forces.

Mme. de Staël's theory of revolution must also be related to her partisan objectives. From this standpoint, it is noteworthy that Stanley Mellon has ranked the Considérations as the first full-scale interpretation of the Revolution to represent the liberal point of view.² The precariousness of the liberals' position under the Restoration -- the ascendancy of a conservative coalition of monarchy, aristocracy and clergy having threatened their surviv-

al as a political force -- informed the polemical aspects of the treatise. The liberals' fate, as Mellon argues, hinged on their ability to defend the Revolution (with which they were irrevocably associated) in a hostile Restoration. Indeed the Revolution assumed a strategic importance to liberals and conservatives alike, as each group staked its political legitimacy on competing interpretations of the phenomenon. The conservatives version of the Revolution, already examined in the preceding chapter, incorporated the following features: the Revolution was perceived en bloc; it originated in conspiracy and was guided by abstract reason; it constituted an unprecedented act of impiety and a criminal transgression of tradition. The liberal version of the Revolution defined itself against this portrait. If de Maistre condemned the Revolution en bloc, Mme. de Staël divided it into discrete phases: through the period of the Constituent Assembly, its aims were moderate and its methods non-violent; the Terror and Napoleonic era were aberrations, logically unrelated to the preceding phases. For Bonald the Old Regime was a beneficent and harmonious order; for Mme. de Staël, it was rent by class conflict and oppressed by the yoke of political absolutism. If the Abbé Barruel spoke of a sinister conspiracy of philosophes, Mme. de Staël maintained that conspiratorial conduct was alien to the French character and declared the Revolution to be the inevitable product of historical progress. Within the course of this chapter, I shall examine these strategies more closely, as well as assess the effect of her partisanship on her intel-

lectual powers as an analyst of revolutionary change.

Mme. de Staël's theory of revolution owed many debts to precursors like Mallet du Pan (Considérations sur la nature de la Révolution française, 1793) Toulangeon (Histoire de France depuis 1789, 1801-04) and, of course, Necker (De la Révolution française, 1796). Yet these immediate influences are less significant to this inquiry than are those structural features which formed a permanent part of Mme. de Staël's intellectual apparatus. Thus the perspectives she applied to the problem of revolutionary change were identical to those applied to other areas of her theoretical concern; the intellectual tensions embodied in her theory of revolution were analogous to those already encountered in her theory of historical progress and her political sociology. Hence the French Revolution was appraised as a vehicle of transcendental historical reason as well as the distinctive product of the French national character. Simultaneously, it was seen to be a result of class conflict, political struggles and psychological aberrations.

It is little wonder, then, that critics have assessed Mme. de Staël's writings on the Revolution as a bundle of contradictions unworthy of serious scholarly attention. Alfred Cobban confined his praise of the Considérations to its "literary" qualities³ and other historiographers have ignored the work completely. Yet for all its exasperating inconsistencies, Mme. de Staël's theory of revolution does not deserve neglect. The tensions and ambiguities of her inter-

pretation display a mind attuned to the subtleties and complexities of the phenomenon; in her writings, the logic of a one-dimensional approach is rejected in favor of a rich variety of theoretical perspectives. Furthermore her findings often provide remarkable anticipations of contemporary scholarship. For example, Cobban's celebrated "demystification" of the Revolution ("the French Revolution is in fact a name we give to a long series of events ... it has ceased to be a revolution and become a series of revolutions")⁴ was presaged by Mme. de Staël's refusal to regard the Revolution as a single conceptual entity. While her attentiveness to the psychology of the lowest strata of revolutionaries foreshadowed the concerns of George Rudé⁴ and Richard Cobb.⁵ Mme. de Staël could rank Guizot and Tocqueville among her direct descendants. In the present chapter, I shall explore the dimensions of her intellectual legacy as well as attempt to distill from her account those insights of permanent value to the analysis of the French Revolution and to revolution in general.

Because Mme. de Staël nowhere offered a clear definition of revolution, my first concern must be to sift the elements of a definition from the body of her writings. This task is complicated by the fact that Mme. de Staël spoke of a series of discrete revolutions but failed to apply consistently the same criteria to each. Thus a number of elements which figure in her concept of revolution -- violence, telescoped social and political change -- relate only to events subsequent to the "initial" revolution of

1789. Ascribing the true achievements of the Revolution to the years 1789-91, Mme. de Staël was anxious to distinguish this "peaceable" and "moderate" phase from the violence and social upheaval of the "second" revolution of 1792-94. The Terror, she maintained against the conservatives, was not the necessary outcome of 1789, but a delayed extremist reaction against past abuses. Its true origin was the Old Regime, not the Revolution of 1789. As a consequence of this polemical maneuver, Mme. de Staël implicitly raised the conceptual problem of accounting for the specifically "revolutionary" character of the events of 1789. It remained a problem she never satisfactorily resolved.

Of all the elements that figured in Mme. de Staël's conception of revolutionary change, only one, totality of scope, was applicable to both the Revolutions of 1789 and 1792. It was this criterion to which she appealed in Des circonstances actuelles to distinguish the French experience from other forms of political change such as the overthrow of a particular sovereign or dynasty, or a national rising against alien rule.⁷ Only the French Revolution entailed "constitutional" change -- a term Mme. de Staël interpreted to mean change affecting the political, social and intellectual life of the nation. Among the factors embraced by this perspective were standards of political legitimacy, principles of social order and property relations. From this standpoint, the Revolution of 1789 engendered a shift in the mode of legitimacy from divine right to consent, the

emergence of public opinion as the operative principle of government, constitutional limitations on the exercise of power, and a social order in which careers open to talent replaced the prerogatives of ascription. The Revolution of 1792 inaugurated a second series of transformations: guided by the meretricious ideal of absolute equality, it leveled the social hierarchy of natural worth, admitted the lower classes into the political process and denied the sanctity of property rights. The principles of 1789 were reaffirmed under Thermidor only to be again swept away by the Napoleonic despotism.

To the criterion of scope, a second ingredient must be added to Mme. de Staël's definition of revolution: degree of change. Revolutionary change was characterized by the radical transformation of existing arrangements; recognizing no traditional restraints on men's conduct, it indiscriminately overturned the prevailing institutions in all spheres of social life. This criterion, which Mme. de Staël appears to have borrowed from the conservatives, predictably caused her difficulty. While she readily applied it to the events of 1794-94, she hesitated as to its relevance to 1789-91. In certain passages of the Considérations she stressed the unprecedented nature of the changes affected by the Constituent Assembly, voicing criticism of its blind adherence to abstract principles:

L'assemblée était saisie par un enthousiasme philosophique dont l'exemple de l'Amerique était une des causes. On voyait un pays qui, n'ayant point encore d'histoire, n'avait rien eu d'ancien a ménager ... On se flattait en France de pouvoir prendre pour base

les principes de gouvernement qu'un peuple nouveau avait raison d'adopter.⁸

More frequently, however, Mme. de Staël praised the moderate character of the first revolution; its judicious preservation of the Bourbon monarchy and formalization of principles latent in French tradition, "La révolution de 1789 n'a donc eu pour but que de régulariser les limites qui, de tous temps, ont existé en France."⁹ Thus she sought to fashion an image of the first revolution acceptable to the Restoration; an image which would legitimate the liberals as the party of order and moderation.

A third element in Mme. de Staël's conception of Revolution was telescoped time. Revolutionary change involved the transformation of a social system within a radically abridged historical moment:

La révolution de France a parcouru tant de périodes en peu de temps, elle a si promptement atteint les extrêmes, qu'il n'y a rien de nouveau sous le soleil que la justice et la vertu...¹⁰

By contrast, non-revolutionary change observed temporal priorities: the transformation of public attitudes through experience and education preceded the establishment of social institutions and practices. By equating revolutionary change with a disorienting suddenness of developments, Mme. de Staël was again at a loss to explain the revolutionary quality of 1789 which, according to her own narrative, was prepared for by years of discontent and the diffusion of enlightened principles.

Mme. de Staël was no more specific regarding the role of violence in revolution. She dated the first intru-

sion of violence as July 14, but clearly stated that the Revolution of 1789 was "decided" with Sieyès' earlier call for a National Assembly. Nonetheless violence figured in all subsequent stages of the Revolution and passages like the following suggest that the use of force constituted a fourth element in Mme. de Staël's concept of revolution:

Il n'y aurait ni fausseté, ni violence dans cet ordre de choses. Les élections seraient libre et les révolutions impossible. On pourrait changer et non bouleverser.¹¹

She attributed the intrusion of violence to a variety of causes, principal among which were the following:

... le caractère que les abus de l'Ancien Régime avaient formé dans le peuple, le manque absolu de morale publique réduit presque en maxime, enfin la fausse application du principe de la souveraineté du peuple dans le gouvernement représentatif...¹²

Mme. de Staël spoke of the abuses of the Old Regime with reference to the debased and impoverished state of the peuple. Unlike Tocqueville, Mme. de Staël detected no amelioration in the economic condition of the peuple prior to the outbreak of the Revolution. They were instead, "réduit à la pauvreté sans espoir"¹³ by taxation; "Qu'aucune peuple n'avait été aussi malheureux depuis cent ans que le peuple français. Si les nègres à Saint-Domingue on commis bien plus d'atrocités encore, c'est parce qu'ils avait été plus opprimés."¹⁴ She disassociated the violence of the Revolution from the abuses suffered by the bourgeoisie which precipitated the constitutional revolution of 1789; violence was rather the recourse of the peuple, living in the depths of misery, impelled by their

appetites and incapable of moderation. By establishing a tie between revolutionary violence and feudal abuses, Mme. de Staël not only challenged the image of the Old Regime held by reactionaries, but implicated them in the Revolution they professed to abhor. The loss of ethical values, the second factor contributing to the intrusion of violence, was a consequence of total telescoped change. Disoriented by the simultaneous transformation of all spheres of social life, the men of the Revolution lived in a state of normlessness; lacking the discipline of shared moral restraints and unable to calculate the effects of their actions, they acceded to the violent impulses of the passions. Although Mme. de Staël stressed this broad systemic explanation, she did single out the role of the philosophes in precipitating the disintegration of moral norms:

Voltaire, en détruisant l'intolérance religieuse, s'était servi, dans une nation plus accessible au ridicule qu'au raisonnement, de tous les genres de plaisanterie. Or le raisonnement se mesure, mais la plaisanterie n'a point de portée fixe: c'est un dissolvant général dont le bien et le mal se blessent également...¹⁵

Analogous passages might be found in the writings of the conservatives, yet, as we shall later observe, Mme. de Staël's treatment of the philosophes was at once more discriminating and sympathetic than her opponents'.

Lastly, Mme. de Staël differentiated the concepts "revolution" and "evolution:" the former admitting of an "end" or termination; the latter, referring to open-ended, incremental, non-violent change. As she employed it, "ter-

mination" was a value-loaded notion:

... lorsque c'est pour établir une Constitution qu'un nation se soulève, la révolution ne finit qu'au moment ou cette Constitution est assez parfait pour que l'autorité puisse se defendre, la nation se reposer...¹⁶ c'est donc quand les principes d'une révolution sont réduits en dogmes sacrés, en points d'honneur, en esprit publique, en vérités évidentes pour la nation, c'est alors que la révolution est complètement terminée...¹⁷

The two mutually dependent conditions which signaled the end of a constitutional revolution were thus: 1) the establishment of a morally acceptable constitution (i.e. one embodying those principles cherished by Mme. de Staël), and 2) a high degree of social consensus. This perspective, introduced in the aptly titled Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution, later formed the basis of her argument in the Considérations that the Restoration marked yet another phase rather than the end of the Revolution; whereas the Charte of 1814 should have assumed the status of the fundamental law, it was issued as a royal decree revokable at the monarch's discretion. To terminate the Revolution, the Charte must be accepted as an immutable contract between the monarch and the nation.¹⁸

As is apparent from this brief discussion, Mme. de Staël's concept of revolution was highly ambiguous. No consistent set of criteria could be abstracted from the discrete series of revolutions which together comprised the French Revolution. Thus violence played no significant role in the Revolution of 1789 nor did it figure in her interpretation of the "continuing" Revolution under the Restoration. As for the degree of change incurred, Mme. de Staël wavered between

seeking precedents for the "liberal" Revolution in French traditions and viewing it as a sweeping change in accordance with the dictates of reason. From the latter perspective, she emphasized the shift in the standard of legitimacy from divine right to consent, the social shift from artifice to nature, etc. This same tension muddled her distinction between revolution and evolution. Her examination of the causes of revolutionary violence betrayed conflicting perspectives: to what extent was it the consequence of passions? ideologies? class interests? Many of these inconsistencies were, as we have seen, partisan in origin. Mme. de Staël interpreted the French Revolution through an a priori framework, ascribing its "gains" to the years 1789-91, and stigmatizing its ensuing phases as extremist aberrations rooted in the abuses of the Old Regime. In an effort to disassociate the liberals from the taint of the Terror, she stressed the moderation of the men of 1789, while neglecting to examine the relation of the "liberal" Revolution to the subsequent course of events. For all its flaws, however, Mme. de Staël's analysis did succeed in pinpointing certain elements that must be taken into account in any theory of revolutionary change. Even more significant was the conceptual breakthrough achieved by viewing the Revolution as a discrete series of events rather than as an indivisible entity to be assessed en bloc.¹⁹

The themes introduced above will be more fully developed in the succeeding section which examines Mme. de Staël's analysis of the causes of the French Revolution.

This inquiry elicited some of Mme. de Staël's most brilliant insights, as attested to by the vitality of her legacy among historians of the Revolution. That her influence radiated in diverse directions confirms the fact that Mme. de Staël is a thinker not easily compartmentalized. No single perspective monopolized her investigation of the causes of the Revolution; she cannot be labeled an exponent of any particular school of analysis whether social, economic or political. The multidimensional quality of Mme. de Staël's approach will be reflected in my exposition of the various perspectives she employed and their interrelationships.

Historical progress:

Seen through Mme. de Staël's broadest optic, the Revolution of 1789-91 was implicit in the logic of history. Its prime objectives -- liberty, constitutionalism, representative government -- were alleged to be dictated by historical reason and hence constituted a universal standard of right. This explanation of events directly challenged the conservative interpretation which laid the responsibility for the Revolution on a sinister conspiracy of philosophes. In addition to removing the stigma from the Revolution by an appeal to historical right, Mme. de Staël substituted the notion of historical inevitability for her opponents' focus on the deliberate machinations of individuals:

La révolution de France est une des grandes époques de l'ordre social. Ceux qui la considèrent comme

un événement accidentel n'ont porté leurs regards ni dans le passé ni dans l'avenir ... Il suffisait cependant de jeter un coup d'oeil sur les principes crises de l'histoire pour se convaincre qu'elles ont été toutes inevitables ...²⁰

The origin of the Revolution must be sought in the role of ideas, those autonomous forces of history which steer the actions of men and the course of events: "Jamais les hommes n'ont été que les instrumens de l'idée dominante; le peuple les a regardés comme des moyens et non des chefs."²¹ Mme. de Staël's conservative opponents also alluded to the determining force of ideas, although this perception did not prevent them from holding the philosophes personally responsible for the Revolution. They associated the Enlightenment with the spread of abstract reason, an inherently subversive force operating independently of existing arrangements and historical traditions. For such conservatives, the Revolution was to be explained in terms of the clash between utopian ideals and social realities, between the opposing principles of historical experience and abstract reason. While Mme. de Staël drew on the conservatives' indictment to interpret the events of 1792, she vehemently denied that the Revolution of 1789 could be analyzed in terms of such simple polar opposities. It must, she argued, be viewed instead as a perfect synthesis of the two principles: a vehicle of reason as actualized through history. The theory of historical progress ideally fitted this strategy.

The theory of historical progress enabled Mme. de Staël to assimilate the Revolution not only into French but into European historical experience as well. She

held the general causes of the Revolution to be common to all of Western Europe civilized by the Romans -- a fact which accounted for its international repercussions and the broad appeal of its ideals. I have already traced in detail Mme. de Staël's dialectical view of the progress of European society from feudalism through absolutism to representative government. The achievement of 1789 was to inaugurate the era of representative government in Continental Europe. Yet the relation of the Revolution to the preceding historical epochs remained ambiguous. Although the constitutionalist principles of 1789 stood in stark contrast to the absolutism of the Old Regime, these principles merely expanded the potential for liberty inherent in feudal institutions. The Revolution transcended rather than abolished the lingering vestiges of feudal society. By acknowledging the progressive role of the feudal nobility within a circumscribed historical setting, Mme. de Staël sought an accommodation with her conservative opponents. Significantly, her scheme of historical analysis implied that the feudal order was already moribund, with the central revolutionary conflict being waged between the proponents of constitutionalism and absolutism.²² This assessment has been mirrored in the work of modern scholars like Alfred Cobban.²³

The norms of historical progress were translated into practice by the two agents of the Revolution: the tiers and the philosophes. Each group was propelled by distinct motives, yet both acted to realize the meaning of history.

The demands of the tiers, born of material self-interest, nonetheless embodied the eternal principles of historical right: equality of opportunity, constitutional guarantees, and representative government. The philosophes, on the other hand, were self-conscious agents of progress; as discoverers of the laws of history, they sought through their teachings to liberate men's minds and bring society into conformity with historical reason. The philosophes' heritage must be identified with the steady linear pace of rational enlightenment traced in chapter III rather than the political dialectic referred to above. Despite obvious incongruities, both conceptions of historical progress informed Mme. de Staël's interpretation of the French Revolution. She went on to distinguish two classes of philosophes: the first, exemplified by Rousseau of the Contrat social, engaged in utopian speculation and abstract reasoning; the second, epitomized by Montesquieu, exhibited a more empirical wisdom.²⁴ Although she ventured no explanation for this division in the philosophes' ranks, Mme. de Staël intended it to undermine conservative claims that Enlightenment thinkers were uniformly followers of Rousseau. Whereas the Revolution of 1789 represented the triumph of Montesquieu's intelligence, the radical democratic ideals of Rousseau found their most complete expression in the Terror.

Mme. de Staël abandoned the theory of progress as an explanation of the Terror and Napoleon. She vacillated between portraying the ideals of Rousseau's revolutionary disciples as anachronistic throwbacks to the classical past

or brutal perversions of the principles of modernity; in either case they represented norms antithetical to the dictates of historical progress. The explanation of how such ideas came to dominate the French nation could not be deduced from the metaphysics of history; it could, however, be derived from an analysis of the social, political and psychological factors that propelled the post 1791 phases of the Revolution.

Before concluding this section, a few words must be devoted to placing Mme. de Staël's interpretation of the Revolution in its intellectual context. Mme. de Staël was not the first to assimilate the French Revolution into a progressionist framework, but rather followed the lead of thinkers like Necker and Barnave.²⁵ Yet it was her own Considérations that had the greatest impact on the liberal historiography of the Restoration. Thus the works of Guizot, Thierry and Thiers carried forward her distinction between the "progressive" revolution of 1789 and its aberrations, further developed her insights with regard to the agents and routes of historical progress, and renewed her polemical thrusts.²⁶ The progressionist theory of the Revolution entered the stream of socialist thought through the writings of the erstwhile liberal, St. Simon. St. Simon, however, maintained that the Revolution had been deflected from its historical goal (i.e. the establishment of a rational scientific society) as early as 1789 when the productive class of industrials abdicated its leadership to

two "bastard classes" -- the lawyers and metaphysicians.²⁷ Although this scheme of analysis was not entirely anticipated by Mme. de Staël (for example, she considered lawyers to be "full-fledged members of the tiers"), her invectives against utopian theorizing together with her apotheosis of the tiers set the stage for St. Simon's analytical perspectives.

National Character

With her examination of the relationship between national character and revolutionary activity, Mme. de Staël shifted her concern from the goals of the Revolution to its dynamics. Thereby she dramatically narrowed her unit of explanation. Her interest no longer focused on historical laws of universal validity, but rather on the social psychology of a particular nation. This angle of vision, in effect, constituted an application of Montesquieu's concept of l'esprit général to the question of revolutionary change. Mme. de Staël's use of this approach was prompted by the conservative charge that the Revolution originated in conspiracy. To counter her opponents' claim, she offered a correlation between national traits and types of conflict: a people disposed to revolutionary activity display characteristics distinct from peoples prone to conspiracy. The traits conducive to revolution, as epitomized in the French character, are a propensity to conform and a gregarious disposition:

Les français sont peu disposés à la guerre civile, et n'ont point de talent pour les conspirations. Ils sont peu disposés à la guerre civile, parce que chez

eux la majorité entraîne presque toujours la minorité; le parti qui passe pour le plus fort devint bien vite tout-puissant car tout le monde s'y réunit. Ils n'ont point de talent pour les conspirations, par cela même qu'ils sont très propres aux révolutions; ils ont besoin de s'exciter mutuellement par la communication de leurs idées; le silence profond, la résolution solitaire qu'il faut pour conspirer, ne sont pas dans leur caractère. ²⁸

Significantly, Mme. de Staël did not place much stress on this approach. Indeed the analysis of national character was of little value to explain the timing of the outbreak of the Revolution or the disparate qualities of its successive phases. Most importantly, the inherent homogeneity of the concept of national character allowed for no social distinctions, and such distinctions were crucial to Mme. de Staël's account of the Revolution's origins.

Social class:

Mme. de Staël's efforts to relate the national character of the French to their propensity towards revolution were effectively neutralized by her third line of approach: the analysis of social class. Whereas the concept of national character presumes the existence of an aggregate national personality, the study of class structure takes as its focus those elements differentiating the nation's various social groups. From this perspective, Mme. de Staël interpreted the events of 1789 as the product of a contradiction between a productive bourgeoisie and an ossified aristocracy, while she explained the Revolution's succeeding phases in terms of the people's rise to power. Seeking out the general causes of France's class struggles, she concentrated her

attention on the phenomenon of social fragmentation under the Old Regime. By analyzing the composition, functions, interests and relationships of France's principal social groups she attempted to isolate those determinants which led the way to the Revolution and contributed to its distinctive course.

Mme. de Staël's interpretation of the Revolution of 1789 took into account both its long-term and immediate causes. She was primarily concerned with the former, from which perspective she viewed the Revolution as the inevitable culmination of a historical class struggle between the privileged orders and the tiers. Indeed certain passages in the Considérations denuded the Revolution of any distinctive historical claim, portraying it as only the most recent in a continuing history of social upheavals:

On peut affirmer ... que l'histoire de France n'est autre chose que les tentatives continuelles de la nation et de la noblesse, l'un pour avoir des droits, et l'autre, des privilèges ...²⁹

This observation could not but undermine the conservatives' idyllic vision of the French past, and they retaliated by pointing out its inconsistency with Mme. de Staël's own doctrine of linear progress.³⁰ I shall not here dwell on her polemical strategies, but proceed to the central thesis of her social analysis: the Revolution was the historical outcome of inherent contradictions between the interests of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

Upon close inspection, Mme. de Staël's general category "privileged orders" breaks down into three narrower

social groupings: the ancient nobility, the recently ennobled and the clergy. To a greater or lesser degree all three groups shared essential traits which set them in polar opposition to the tiers. They were characterized, first, by their failure to provide useful social services. Through various routes the privileged orders had abandoned productive or necessary occupations to become parasites on the nation. With the rise of standing armies, the nobility of ancient lineage no longer rendered the essential military services of their ancestors.³¹ Members of the tiers who purchased titles deliberately forsook their trades to enjoy the privileges of an eclipsed social order.³² The clergy provided another variant by exercising functions incompatible with their station: rather than ministering to the spiritual needs of the people, the clergy had implicated itself in the economic and political affairs of the nation.³³ Quality of mind was a second defining characteristic of the privileged orders. The attitudes of the aristocracy had been shaped by the artifices of court etiquette: their intelligence consisted in a knack of pleasing, a sensitivity to rank, and a keen and nimble wit. Unable to transcend the mental boundaries of their class, the greater part of the aristocracy was incapable of recognizing the practical claims of the tiers:

... la majorité de leur ordre ... mettait une obstination inouïe à n'adopter aucun mode de conciliation ... Ils avaient une certaine fatuité aristocratique dont on ne peut avoir l'idée nulle part d'ailleurs qu'en France; un mélange de frivolité dans les manières et de pédanterie dans les opinions; et le tout ré-

unit au plus complet dedain pour les lumières et pour l'esprit ...³⁴

As for the parvenu nobility, they eagerly embraced the attitudes and prejudices of their newly acquired rank.³⁵ The clergy exhibited a similarly rigid mentality owing to their Ultramontanism, vested interests in temporal power and celibate aloofness from social life.³⁶ All three groups defined their interests in terms of the retention of their privileged status; an interest Mme. de Staël tendentiously described as "le droit de nuire au reste de la nation."³⁷

The distinctive characteristics Mme. de Staël attributed to the tiers provide a neat contrast with those imputed to the privileged orders. Whereas the privileged orders either performed functions incompatible with their station or ceased completely to meet social needs, the middle class provided services essential to the nation: merchants and financiers had promoted peace, trade and prosperity; men of letters had provided the intellectual basis for social reform. Whereas the intelligence of the privileged orders was rooted in artifice, illusion and prejudice, the mind of the tiers was empirical, rational and pragmatic. The interest of the tiers was the achievement of a social and political order rooted in "the nature of things." This translated as government by public opinion, legal controls on the exercise of power, careers open to talent, and the abolition of fiscal privileges.

The opposing interests of the privileged and non-privileged orders took concrete form in the atomized so-

ciety of the Old Regime. Anticipating Tocqueville, Mme. de Staël spoke of the caste-like separation of the social classes,³⁸ the insurmountable barriers of ascription which insulated the aristocracy not only from the tiers, but also from the newly ennobled who nonetheless effected their posture and prejudices. Mme. de Staël pointed to the lack of "public spaces" in pre-revolutionary society; the absence of arenas where men of different classes could meet together to exchange ideas or share the experience of political power. All social gatherings were scrupulously segregated,³⁹ while the parlements remained predominantly aristocratic bodies affording little contact with the tiers. Necker's proposal for the creation of provincial assemblies went unheeded as a consequence of the very deficiency it was geared to remedy:

Les dissensions qu'on a vues tout à coup éclater entre les classes privilégiées et la nation n'auraient peut-être pas existé, si depuis longtemps les trois ordres se fussent rapprochés en discutant en commune les affaires d'une même province ... Les grands seigneurs français n'étaient pas assez instruits ... Cette éducation superficielle a été l'une des causes de la ruine des nobles; ils ne pouvaient plus lutter contre les lumières du tiers états ... Les assemblées provinciales auraient par degrés amené les grands seigneurs à primer par leur savoir en administration, comme jadis ils l'emportaient par leur épée ...⁴⁰

The failure of social communication reinforced the isolation of the privileged orders, making it impossible for them to discern the rising interests of the tiers. The absence of public spaces also contributed to the propensity of certain members of the intelligensia to engage in utopian theorizing. Innocent of the responsibilities of

political power, men of letters were prone to envisage social reform in highly abstract terms. Thus she wrote of Rousseau's

Contrat social:

Qu'on place donc au-dessus de l'ouvrage de Rousseau celui de l'homme d'état dont les observations auroient précédé les théories, qui seroit arrivé aux idées générales par la connoissance des faites particuliers, et qui se liveroit moins en artiste à tracer le plan d'un édifice régulier, qu'en homme habile à réparer celui qu'il trouveroit construit.⁴¹

Yet she coupled this insight with high praise of the eighteenth century intelligensia for its justifiable criticisms of the Old Regime and initiatives toward practical reform:

Dans le siècle de Louis XIV, la perfection de l'art même d'écrire étoit le principe objet des écrivains; mais dans le dix-huitième siècle, on voit déjà la littérature prendre un caractère différent. Ce n'est plus un art seulement, c'est un moyen; elle devient une arme pour l'esprit humaine ... si l'art social atteint un jour en France à la certitude d'une science dans ses principes et dans son application, c'est de Montesquieu que l'on doit compter ses premiers pas ...⁴²

Taken together, these passages suggest that Mme. de Staël differentiated between utopian and empirical strands of Enlightenment thought. Yet she never fully developed this distinction, nor did she investigate the reasons for it.

A second factor contributing to the fragmentation of pre-revolutionary society was the contradiction between social and economic privilege and function. Whereas the tiers had proven itself indispensable to the prosperity, stability and progress of the nation, it was denied the prerogatives of a ruling class. The tiers occupied all im-

portant administrative posts, had created the nation's economic infrastructure, and served as the vehicle of France's entry into modern commercial society. Yet in spite of these achievements, the aristocracy continued to monopolize the positions of social prestige and enjoy exclusive economic privileges.⁴³ The hostility generated by the contradiction between function and privilege also explained the resentment felt by the tiers toward the clergy. While conservatives like de Maistre portrayed the Revolution as a deliberate act of impiety, Mme. de Staël insisted that the clergy became a target of attack precisely because it had abdicated its spiritual duties to pursue worldly gain, power and privilege. The Revolution's assault against the Church was not motivated by a spirit of atheism, but rather by vexation over the Church's self-interested temporal involvements:

L'influence du clergé sur les affaires temporelles révoltait universellement; et, comme le vrai sentiment religieux est ce qui éloigne le plus des intrigues et du pouvoir, on n'avait plus aucune foi dans ceux qui ne servaient de la religion pour influer sur les affaires de ce monde. ⁴⁴

To summarize: Mme. de Staël depicted pre-revolutionary France as an atomized society rent by class hostility and mistrust, in which the classical question of legitimate authority (framed in terms of public vs. private interests) took the form of a struggle between the privileged and non-privileged orders. To this classical formulation, Mme. de Staël introduced the dimension of time: interests once universally valid could be rendered

obsolete by the advance of history. In 1789 both privileged and non-privileged orders attacked the political edifice: the one representing archaism; the other, progress. Both were pursuing their class interests, but history had transferred the universality of claims to the shoulders of the tiers.

Within the context of this broad sociological framework, Mme. de Staël sought to interpret the immediate causes of the Revolution. She contended that major historical events could be explained by antecedent general causes, yet she did not minimize the role of accident. Mme. de Staël analyzed the financial crisis that precipitated the summoning of the Estates-General as the outgrowth of two interrelated conditions. First it was seen as a consequence of the economic privileges enjoyed by the aristocracy, whose tax immunities deprived the state of vital sources of revenue.⁴⁶ Significantly, Mme. de Staël did not place much weight on this explanation later echoed by Tocqueville, but discredited by recent scholarship.⁴⁷ Rather she emphasized the link between France's bankrupt treasury and the general state of social and political malaise afflicting the Old Regime. Her diagnosis pivoted on the concept of public credit. Following Necker's lead, Mme. de Staël perceived an intimate correlation between the wealth of a nation and its ability to generate public credit; an ability which hinged on the confidence of the nation in its political institutions and social arrangements. Under the Old Regime this

confidence was inhibited by the arbitrary character of political rule and the mutual distrust of the various social classes. Unable to raise revenues through voluntary public investment, the Crown was left no alternative to new taxation. This explanation remained consistent with Mme. de Staël's view that the wealth of the nation was steadily accumulating in the hands of the bourgeoisie, whereas her first hypothesis rather incongruously ascribed the crucial financial role to an eclipsed aristocracy. France's bankruptcy contributed to awakening the tiers to the realization of their true power, as well as to the fact that their economic interests lay with the creation of a healthy, rational and stable social order. Thus the tiers issued demands more far reaching than the mere equalization of tax burdens or the abolition of feudal privileges. They called for the establishment of a constitutional state, government by public opinion, and a social hierarchy of merit. The material interests of the tiers lay at the root of these demands; hence Mme. de Staël's parallels between public credit and government by public opinion:

... le crédit est donc la véritable découverte moderne qui a lié les gouvernements avec les peuples. C'est le besoin du crédit qui oblige les gouvernements à ménager l'opinion publique; et, de même que le commerce a civilisé les nations, le crédit, qui en est une conséquence, a rendu nécessaires des formes constitutionnelles quelconques, pour assurer la publicité dans les finances et garantir les engagements contractés ...⁴⁸

The social irregularities of the Old Regime contributed much to determine the course of the Revolution. With the convening of the Estates-General, the atomized structure of French society was reproduced in microcosm: the three

orders assembled "comme trois nations distinctes."⁴⁹ The isolation of the privileged orders translated into an intransigent opposition to the claims of the tiers. They refused to concede equitable representation to the tiers in matters of debating and voting, nor would they relinquish economic privileges in the name of practical reform. The defeat of Necker's proposal for the adoption of English institutions -- protecting aristocratic interests through an hereditary upper chamber -- further testified to the rigidity of the noblesse:

Le roi déclarait aussi dans le projet de M. Necker, que, relativement à l'organisation future des états généraux, il ne sanctionnerait qu'un corps législatif en deux chambres ... Tandis que M. Necker exposait volontiers sa popularité en se déclarant le défenseur d'une chambre haute, les aristocrates se croyaient dépouillés par cette institution ...⁵⁰

Concessions from the privileged orders had to be extracted by intimidation; inexperienced in social interchange, they were unskilled at bargaining or compromise. The intransigence of the privileged orders provoked a reciprocal response on the part of certain representatives of the tiers who had hardened their disposition towards their opponents. Hence the Constituent Assembly passed decrees to abolish all titles of nobility and nationalize the Church.⁵¹ The noblesse, in turn, reacted to these developments in a manner which again demonstrated their inflexibility; the emigration of 1791 symbolized for Mme. de Staël the continued adherence of the noblesse to feudal privilege and their traitorous abandonment of the nation:

Des circonstances particulières à l'histoire de France y ont séparé les privilégiés et le tiers état d'une manière plus prononcée que dans aucune autre pays ... En conséquence, les nobles émigrés on voulu traiter la presque totalité du peuple français comme des vassaux revoltés; et loin de rester dans leur pays, soit pour triompher de l'opinion dominante, soit pour s'y réunir, ils ont trouvé plus simple d'invoquer la gendarmerie européenne, afin de mettre Paris à la raison ...⁵²

Let us examine Mme. de Staël's concept of the bourgeois Revolution of 1789 in historical and critical perspective. The arguments of both Tocqueville and Marx were foreshadowed in her interpretation of the Revolution as a class struggle. Mme. de Staël was indeed close to Marx in her contention that the Revolution could be explained in terms of the competing interests of two broadly conceived social groups -- the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. If the two thinkers interpreted the concept of social class differently, on a general level both regarded the bourgeoisie as the historically ascendant class, stressing its functional role as entrepreneurs and financiers. It may be noted that Mme. de Staël did, in fact, acknowledge the complex social structure of the tiers; she numbered among its ranks not only businessmen but intellectuals, lawyers, functionaries, landholders, etc. ("... la nation, qui renfermait les écrivains, les capitalistes, les négociants, un grand nombre de propriétaires et un foule d'individus employés dans l'administration")⁵³ Yet it remained for thinkers like St. Simon to stress the heterogeneity of this collection. As for Mme. de Staël, she glossed over these divisions to concentrate on the pivotal contradiction between an entrepreneurial tiers and

an eclipsed noblesse. This "myth" of the bourgeois revolution has come under sharp attack by many contemporary students of the revolution. While the targets of their criticism have been Marxist historiographers like Soubol, their findings simultaneously reveal difficulties with Mme. de Staël's perspective. A fundamental criticism relates to her methodological vocabulary: historians like Cobban⁵⁴ cogently argue that over-full categories of analysis like noblesse and tiers deceptively conceal the intricate nature of these social groups. If Mme. de Staël narrowly escapes this indictment by her tacit admission of social heterogeneity, the core of her analysis is discredited by the revelation of the "non-capitalist" nature of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. The researches of Pierre Goubert⁵⁵, George Taylor⁵⁶ and Cobban corroborate that the tiers of 1789 consisted predominately of lawyers and petty functionaries rather than an entrepreneurial elite; that French commerce and industry had remained parochial until the late nineteenth century and had, in fact, been retarded by the Revolution. Mme. de Staël is in the curious position of confirming these findings in her narrative (recall that she spoke of numerous [foule de] administrative officers), yet ignoring them in her theoretical hypotheses. Her role as an apologist of the tiers goes far to explain this discrepancy. Nevertheless Mme. de Staël's interpretation transcended her ideological purposes: thus she implicated the tiers in the excesses of the Revolution (albeit in response to the intransigence of the privileged orders) and advocated compromise with the interests of the noblesse. This latter

posture was logically precluded by her theory of class struggle and can be explained only by reference to other levels of her analysis. A related aspect of her thought --- later to be crystallized in Tocqueville's L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution --- focused on the incompatibility between function and privilege under the Old Regime and the concept of social "caste". If this has proven a fertile hypothesis for historians, it has not survived the researches of modern scholarship. The studies of François Bluche,⁵⁷ Jean Egret,⁵⁸ and Vivian Gruder⁵⁹ all point to a high degree of social mobility under the Old Regime, while Georges Lefebvre's Études Orléanaises⁶⁰ has discredited the theory of a parasitic nobility.

It was in terms of a third social group --- the peuple --- that Mme. de Staël sought to explain the degeneration of the liberal ideals of 1789 into the despotism of the Terror. She dated the ascendancy of the peuple as the October days of 1789,⁶¹ but held their actual reign to span the period from the Legislative Assembly through the Terror (a strategy which allowed her to claim the period 1788-1791 as the heritage of bourgeois liberalism).⁶² Mme. de Staël's investigation of the long-term causes of the peuple's revolution again led her to focus on the social organization of the Old Regime. Like the tiers and the privileged orders, the peuple shared certain social experiences which informed their mental outlook and subsequent course of action. Two such contributory causes were class alienation and economic oppression. The isolation of the peuple from the higher

orders --- a consequence of the fragmented social structure of the Old Regime --- generated feelings of helplessness and resentment while inhibiting all salutary motives of emulation:

Les différentes classes de la société n'ayant presque point eu de relations entre elles en France, leur antipathie mutuelle en était plus fort ... Dans aucun pays les gentilshommes n'ont été aussi étrangers au reste de la nation; ils ne touchaient à la seconde classe que pour la froisser. Ailleurs, une certaine bonhomie, des habitudes même plus vulgaires, confondent davantage les hommes bien qu'ils soient légalement séparés; mais l'élégance de la noblesse française accroissait l'envie qu'elle inspirait. Il était aussi difficile d'imiter ses manières que d'obtenir ses prérogatives.⁶³

To the effects of class isolation were added those of economic oppression. The people endured the brunt of royal taxation and feudal dues; they suffered keenly from disastrous economic policies which fueled inflation and created food shortages. The unrelenting struggle for mere subsistence condemned the people to ignorance and brutalized their manners. As Necker had done before her,⁶⁴ Mme. de Staël described the mental attitude generated by the "culture of poverty" as marked by violence, jealousy and impatience.⁶⁵ Hardened by indigence and militant in disposition, the people emerged as the driving force of the Terror.

Thus Mme. de Staël appears to have made an overwhelming case for inevitability of the Terror, as well as scored a polemical victory by linking it to the oppressive policies of the Old Regime. Nonetheless her defense of the Revolution required that she portray the Terror as an aberration rather than the logical outcome of the Revolution

itself. With this end in view, Mme. de Staël turned to examine the Terror's immediate causes. Aristocratic intransigence prevented the consolidation of a constitutional monarchy during the early stages of the Revolution, paving the way for the ultimate disintegration of social and political stability. The emigration of the aristocracy in 1791 deprived the regime of a needed buffer against mob violence. Most significantly, aristocratic prejudice pushed certain representatives of the tiers to assume increasingly radical postures (and hence to betray their "real" interests). This radicalized bourgeoisie became the prime agents in the development of the political consciousness of the masses. Lusting for personal power, Jacobin members of the tiers orchestrated the spontaneous violence of the masses to their own political ends. They took no administrative measures to alleviate the conditions of scarcity that provoked popular violence, but fanned the fires of discontent with radical rhetoric.⁶⁶ Drawing on the ideas of the utopian philosophes, they translated the inarticulate resentment of the masses into a coherent set of demands for political equality, social leveling and the redistribution of property. The internal momentum of the Revolution also contributed to politicizing the masses. With each outburst of popular violence, the people grew more secure in their strength and conscious of their shared objectives. It is noteworthy that Mme. de Staël vacillated between portraying the Terror as the political triumph of the masses and recognizing it as the reign of self-serving

politicians who duped the masses into carrying them to power:

Le règne de la Terreur doit être uniquement attribué aux principes de la tyrannie; on les y retrouve tout entiers. Les formes populaires adoptées par ce gouvernement n'étaient qu'une sorte de cérémonial qui convenait à ces despotes farouches; mais les membres du comité de salut public professaient à la tribune même le code du machiavélisme, c'est-à-dire le pouvoir fondé sur l'avilissement des hommes ...⁶⁷

This interpretation of the Terror transcended Mme. de Staël's ideological aims to draw upon her political concept of "despotism - tyranny". Thus she explained the emergence of the Thermidorian republic in terms of the inherent instability of the despotic regime. Thermidor reaffirmed the bourgeois principles of 1798, but for reasons extensively examined in chapter IV failed to survive the ascendancy of Napoleon.

Mme. de Staël's account of the revolution of 1792-1795 offers striking grounds for comparison and contrast with the analyses of Tocqueville and Marx. Against Tocqueville's thesis that the economic conditions of the peuple had been on the upgrade under the Old Regime, Mme. de Staël anticipated a Marxian perspective in her emphasis on the link between indigence and revolution. For his hypothesis on the noxious effects of class isolation, however, Tocqueville was clearly in her debt. With regard to the events of the period, Mme. de Staël joined with Marx in focusing on the pivotal role of the masses. And despite the disparate philosophies of progress held by the two thinkers, both attributed the violence of the Terror to Robespierre's anachronistic misreading of history.⁶⁸

Recent scholarship centering on the events of the Terror points up both the strengths and weakness of Mme. de Staël's account. Again her unit of class analysis --- the peuple --- proves overfull: it fails to discriminate among such diverse groups as the rural peasantry, the urban poor, artisan, small shopkeepers, the indigent, etc. The significance of these distinctions has been painstakingly demonstrated by historians like Cobban and Olwen Hufton.⁶⁹ A related problems concern Mme. de Staël's attempt to establish a link between pauperization and revolution: studies have revealed the sans-coulottes as predominately artisans and shopkeepers --- men of moderate means, not to be equated with the poor or indigent.⁷⁰ If Mme. de Staël's deceptively simple characterization of the peuple can be explained in terms of her ideological objectives, much of her analysis remained remarkably innocent of social bias. Thus she acknowledged the leadership of the Jacobins to be drawn from the ranks of the tiers. She recognized the discrepancy between the civic ideals professed by the Jacobin elite and the realities of their dictatorial power. This insight, combined with her theory of the progressive crystallization of the peuple's political consciousness during the course of the Revolution, prefigured Albert Soboul's most compelling thesis.⁷¹ Her emphasis on the cultural and psychological aspects of poverty -- an emphasis also found in Necker -- anticipated the contemporary research of Chevalier,⁷² Kaplow,⁷³ and Rudé.⁷⁴

Politics and Constitutions:

In his essay "Political vs. Social Interpretations of the French Revolution," Alfred Cobban draws a useful distinction between those historians who view the Revolution as a struggle for political power and those who perceive it primarily in sociological terms. This discrimination is of capital importance to the understanding of Mme. de Staël, who patently availed herself of both analytical perspectives. Within the pages of the Considérations are thus to be found curiously discrepant hypotheses: whereas Mme. de Staël's sociological interpretation of the Revolution of 1789 pitted the noblesse against the tiers, her political interpretation emphasized their congruent interests in curbing the power of the Crown. Her contrast between feudal and bourgeois society gave way to an analysis of the political transition from an absolutist to a constitutionalist order. To be sure, the two levels of analysis cannot be neatly separated since Mme. de Staël insisted upon the close interrelationship between politics and society. Nonetheless she recognized that categories of social analysis were insufficient to explain political allegiances: the noblesse comprised liberal constitutionalists as well as reactionaries; the tiers included in its ranks radical egalitarians as well as moderate liberals. In the present section I shall be investigating those areas of concern to Mme. de Staël in her capacity as a political analyst of revolution. Central to my discussion will be the character of political absolutism

under the Old Regime, the nature of resistance to it, and the problems of constitution-making under the succeeding stages of the Revolution.

Two factors, in Mme. de Staël's view, accounted for both the strength and fatal weakness of the Old Regime. The first she held to be state centralization. The administration of France had effectively come into the hands of a small number of Intendants directly responsible to the King's ministers in Paris.⁷⁵ Correlative with this development was the imposition of administrative uniformity; a proliferating bureaucracy penetrated into the various spheres of proliferating bureaucracy penetrated into the various spheres of provincial life gradually extinguishing all vestiges of local diversity.⁷⁶ Paris emerged as the dominant metropolis of the nation. Mme. de Staël assessed these developments with a dialectician's sense of paradox. Rehearsing the arguments of the thèse royale,⁷⁷ she appreciated the role of state centralization in the political recruitment of new social forces (the tiers) and the transition to modernity.⁷⁸ Yet she also perceived that these circumstances proved fatal to the system that gave them birth. The tiers became conscious of their essential interest in the achievement of free decentralized institutions and representative government. Mme. de Staël did not carry these insights as far as they would later be taken by Tocqueville. For example while she noted a correlation between the growth of Paris and revolutionary instability, it was the presence of the aristocracy rather than the urban poor that she stressed:

Une autre cause des malheurs de la révolution, c'est la prodigieuse influence de Paris sur la France. Or l'établissement des administrations provinciales devait diminuer l'ascendant de la capitale sur tous les points du royaume; car les grands propriétaires, intéressés pas les affaires dont ils se seraient mêlés chez eux, aurait eu un motif pour quitter Paris et vivre dans leurs terres. ⁷⁹

The Old Regime's formula for absolutism coupled administrative coupled administrative centralization with the absence of constitutional controls. To the question posed in chapter XI, "Y avait-il une constitution en France avant la révolution?" Mme. de Staël responded negatively. A constitution -- implying the presence of fixed restraints on the exercise of power, settled political procedures, and a system of legal guarantees protecting the rights of citizens -- was demonstrably not in effect under the Old Regime. First, there was no consensus with regard to the powers possessed by the various governmental organs and corporate bodies. The political system was characterized instead by an anarchy of competing claims and disparate procedures:

Quoi qu'il soit, il n'est aucune loi, même fondamentale, qui n'ait été disputée dans un siècle quelconque; il n'est rien qui n'été l'objet d'opinions opposées. Les rois étaient-ils ou non législateurs du royaume, et pouvaient-ils ou non lever des impôts de leur propre mouvement?... ou bien les états généraux étaient-ils les représentants du peuple à qui seuls appartient ce droit de consentir les subsides? ... Quelle était la puissance politique des parlements⁸⁰

Second, those institutions created as checks on royal power, the parlements and états-généraux, had been emasculated by the Crown. The claim of the états-généraux to sanction the levying of taxes was contested by the King, with the result that it was convened infrequently⁸¹ and lacked

fixed precedents. As for the parlements which "semblaient donc destinés à servir de limites habituelles à l'autorité de rois,"⁸² they could be silenced by the Crown by the process of lit de justice. Whatever power the parlements did exert was directed against all initiatives towards rational reform, such as Necker's program for the creation of provincial assemblies.⁸³ Because no clearly defined rights restricted the powers of the Crown, no rights could be considered secure. All members of society, including the noblesse, were dependent for their protection upon the disposition of the King:

Étaient-ce les nobles qui avaient des privilèges, excepté celui de payer moins d'impôts? Encore un roi despote pouvait-il l'abolir. Il n'existait pas un droit politique quelconque dont la noblesse put ou dû se vanter ...⁸⁴

Arbitrary and oppressive rule were inherent features of the system:

Les individus prevenus de crime d'État ont été presque tous soustraits à leurs juges naturels ... Le code de terreur contre les protestants, les supplices cruels et la torture, ont subsisté jusqu'à la révolution ...⁸⁵

The Old Regime, Mme. de Staël concluded, collapsed under the weight of its own irregularities. Both the nobility and the tiers launched attacks on it, each seeking security, yet each seeking it in a different form.

Mme. de Staël's recognition that the Revolution began as an aristocratic uprising -- the parlements' campaign against the monarchy -- was not unrelated to her polemical objective of implicating the reactionary nobility in the very events they professed to abhor. In this instance,

however, her partisan motives served to enrich rather than disfigure her analysis. She called attention to the parlements' stance in defense of feudal privilege against all ministerial efforts for reform.⁸⁶ She cited the subversive inconsistencies in parliamentary remonstrances which simultaneously recognized the absolute sovereignty of the Crown and the authority of the Feudal Constitution which empowered the parlements as guardians of France's fundamental laws.⁸⁷ She appreciated the parlements' role in propagating the idea of popular sovereignty,⁸⁸ yet ridiculed their pretention to represent the national will.⁸⁹ The function of national representation devolved, she argued, on the états-généraux owing to Phillippe le Bel's introduction of "les députés de la nation comme troisième ordre."⁹⁰ The demands of the tiers, politicized through the struggle between the Crown and the aristocracy, were thus also grounded in the doctrine of a historic constitution. From this standpoint, Mme. de Staël's characterization of 1789 is significant: "La révolution de 1789 n'a donc eu pour but que de régulariser les limites qui, de tout temps, ont existé en France."⁹¹ Indeed it bears out the findings of George Taylor who recently subjected Tocqueville's thesis on the relationship of the Enlightenment to the Revolution to empirical analysis. His survey of the cahiers de doléances written by the electoral assemblies in February, March and April of 1789 revealed no appeals to the abstract principles cited by Tocqueville, but rather demands for the restoration of the fundamental

laws embodied in the historic constitution. Mme. de Staël's discussion of the bearing of the Enlightenment on the Revolution -- pivoting on a distinction between the "empiricist" philosophes whose spirit presided over the events of 1789 and the "abstract rationalists" of 1792 -- is compatible with this account and avoids the pitfalls of Tocqueville's analysis.

Recollections of abuse under the Old Regime came to affect the character of political behavior subsequent to 1789, and transformed a juridical into a violent revolution. The actions of the King during the period of the états-généraux bore the imprint of a tradition of arbitrariness and inconsistency. He vacillated between acquiescence to the reforms demanded by the constitutionalists and resistance, either in the form of open hostility or covert duplicity.⁹³ Instead of placing himself at the head of the juridical revolution (i.e. following Necker's proposals for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy of the English type), he allowed himself to be advised those members of the aristocracy who now saw their interests to lie with the absolute prerogatives of the King.⁹⁴ Louis XVI continued the tradition of government by conspiracy by duplicating his ministry with a secret council of courtiers that paralleled the functions of the official body, but remained hidden from public scrutiny.⁹⁵ His secretive machinations produced an atmosphere charged with rumor and innuendo.

If the politics of the Old Regime shaped the behavior of the absolutists, it was no less a determinant of

the actions of the remainder of the nation. Ancient abuses defined the quality of subsequent politics. The novelty of the political arena engendered utopian expectations of reform; recollections of oppression provoked varying, progressively radical degrees of reaction. The rigidity of political intelligence was reflected in the various constitutions enacted during the revolutionary era. Each document, embodying the dominant suspicions of the period, perpetuated rather than remedied the imperfections of the past.

At no stage of the Revolution could agreement be reached on the nature of legitimate political arrangements and values. Illustrative of this point was the broad range of political postures maintained by deputies of the National Assembly. Absolutists adhered to the doctrine of divine right; moderates espoused a constitutional monarchy modeled on England; the remainder of the deputies "se divisait en quatre sections, dont on pouvait aisément saisir les différences."⁹⁶ The spirit of distrust and intransigence fomented under the Old Regime carried over into the early stages of the Revolution:

... la division des partis amena malheureusement la confusion des pouvoirs. La défiance qu'excitaient les intentions du roi ... empêcha qu'on ne lui donnât les moyens nécessaire pour rétablir l'ordre, et les chefs de l'Assemblée ne combattirent point cette défiance..⁹⁷

A second factor influencing the politics of the National Assembly was the novelty of the political process to its participants. Because the Old Regime failed to engage the involvement of its subjects, their newly acquired power

proved an intoxicant:

Songez à ce que doivent être les hommes qui, n'ayant jamais exercé aucune droit politique, se trouvent tout à coup en possession d'une jouissance funeste à tous les individus, le pouvoir sans bornes ... il seront longtemps avant de connaître la théorie de la liberté, si simple quand on est né dans un pays où les lois et les moeurs vous l'enseignent ...⁹⁸

The deputies lack of practical political experience also explained their attraction to utopian ideals:

Pendant que la France avait à craindre la famine et la banquerote, les députés prononçaient des discours dans lesquels ils disaient que chaque homme tient de la nature le droit et le désir d'être heureux ... et d'autres vérités philosophiques faites pour être discutées dans les livres, et non au milieu des assemblées ...⁹⁹

The Constitution of 1791, the product of the National Assembly, bore the scars and perpetuated the conflicts of the process which gave it birth. Its provisions for a single-chambered legislature and a weak suspensive veto for the King were the issue of a wholesale reaction against the past, rather than a judicious sorting out of historical experience. The creation of a Chamber of Peers would have "changé la noblesse conquérante en magistrature patricienne."¹⁰⁰ Yet it was opposed both by the absolutists "dans l'espoir d'amener le bien par l'excès du mal"¹⁰¹ as well as by the parti populaire, incapable of perceiving the political benefits of a traditional body. Similarly, the question of the veto was decided by the fears of the public and the vanity of the deputies which fed on the accolades of the gallery:

Le veto qu'on devait lui accorder serait-il suspensif ou absolu? Ce mot absolu retentissait aux oreilles du vulgaire comme s'il avait été question de despotisme, et l'on vit commencer la funeste influence des cris du peuple sur les décisions des hommes éclairés ...¹⁰²

The immoderate reaction against the past contained more than a taste of former arbitrariness: the creation of a constitutional clergy was needlessly severe; the stripping of the King's prerogatives, indiscriminate. Apart from these criticisms of the Constitution of 1789, Mme. de Staël found much to praise in the work of the Legislative Assembly. Its protection of civil liberties, administrative and judicial reforms, and the establishment of the National Guard stood as crowning achievements of the era and manifestations of the "true" spirit of the Revolution.

Mme. de Staël's defense of the Revolution ended with the dissolution of the National Assembly; her treatment of the Revolution's succeeding phases was increasingly marked by polemical invective. The Legislative Assembly gave full expression to the radical propensities already in evidence during the early stages of the Revolution. Under its auspices the reaction against the Old Regime came full circle: if the Old Regime had lacked a constitution, political events were now being shaped by the proliferation of extra-constitutional clubs; if the Old Regime had been arbitrary in its methods, the decrees of the Legislative Assembly evidenced an analogous disregard for fixed legal procedures:

L'assemblée constituante ne persécuta jamais ni les individus, ni les classes, mais l'Assemblée suivante ne fit que des décrets de circonstances...¹⁰⁷ On livrait l'existence d'un citoyen à des dénonciations qui portaient sur les opinions présumées. Que craint-on du despotisme, si ce n'est un tel décret?¹⁰⁸

Mme. de Staël disposed quickly of the Terror, "Nous passerons le plus rapidement qu'il nous sera possible sur cette

crise affreuse ..."¹⁰⁹ Her observation, "Le gouvernement ressemblait à l'affreux instrument qui donnait la mort: on y voyait la hache plutôt que la main qui la faisait mouvoir"¹¹⁰ strategically recalled de Maistre's striking metaphor of the government as guillotine, thus attesting to her own repudiation of the Revolution's excesses. Partisan polemics also contributed to her confused portrait of the Terror as an anachronistic experiment in classical democracy, an old-fashioned despotism masquerading as a republic, and a qualitatively new form of despotic rule.

Thus Mme. de Staël's analysis of the political realities of the revolution was frequently muddled by ideological distortion and intellectual confusion. Ambiguities plagued not only her treatment of the Terror, but also her portrait of the Old Regime and her account of the political aims of 1789. On the one hand, the Old Regime was presented as a rational and modernizing order, while on the other, it was depicted as an arbitrary absolutism of byzantine complexities. The political objectives of 1789 were interchangeably equated with the restoration of the ancient French constitution, the establishment of the English constitution and the implementation of the proposals of the "moderate" philosophes. Nonetheless Mme. de Staël merits praise for her sensitivity to the Revolution as a political as well as a social phenomena, for her refusal to reduce political behavior to a function of social class (although she was not wholly innocent of this charge). Nor did Mme. de Staël's

partisan desire to vindicate the revolution of 1789-91 blind her to its failures. She correctly perceived the unwitting role of the révolte nobiliaire in initiating the Revolution. Her insistence on the conservative character of demands for reform in 1789 corroborate the findings of recent scholarship. Among the first to appreciate the dialectic of modernization and revolution, Mme. de Staël also explored the revolutionary consequences of political oppression. Before Tocqueville, she applied the categories of civic humanism (i.e. her discussion of the absence of public spaces under the Old Regime) to explain the radicalization of revolutionary movements.

Great Men:

I have thus far examined Mme. de Staël's analysis of the French Revolution from a number of perspectives ranging from an abstract theory of progress to a failure of politics within a particular collectivity. Throughout these discussions, the status of the individual actor has been explicitly subordinated to historical reason¹¹¹ or implicitly embraced by a suprapersonal unit of analysis such as national character or social class. Yet in face of evidence to the contrary, the role of the individual actor figured prominently in Mme. de Staël's interpretation of the Revolution. As often as she took the position that great men were the instruments of still greater forces, she also insisted that all depended on particular decisions of certain key individuals at contingent historical moments:

La philosophie commune se plaît à croire que tout ce qui est arrivé était inévitable: mais à quoi serviraient donc la raison et la liberté de l'homme, si sa volonté à si visiblement accompli? 112

Mme. de Staël's choice of expression in the Considérations presupposed man's ability to chose, to shape history and to bear the responsibilities for its failures; hence the appearance of such phrases as "if he only had" or "he ought to have." Her frequent allusions to the errors and faults of statesmen¹¹³ were irreconcilable with a mode of thought assumed men to be the passive instruments of historical reason. Her several chapters devoted to characterizing the leading figures of the Revolution further attest to her appreciation of the unique role of the individual.

From this perspective, the Revolution was to be explained in terms of the wise counsels, evil designs and distinctive policies of its leaders. The Revolution had its roster of heros and villians. Malsherbes ranked among the former:

M. de Malsherbes voulait le rétablissement de l'édicte de Henri IV en faveur des protestans, l'abolition des lettres de cachet, et la suppression de la censure ... Il y a plus de quarante années que M. de Malsherbes soutenait cette doctrine; il aurait suffi de l'adopter alors pour préparer par les lumières ce qu'il a fallu depuis céder à la violence... 114

But pride of place in Mme. de Staël's pantheon was predictably reserved for Necker, whose programs of financial and administrative reform would have consolidated the Revolution's gains without recourse to violence. The King, in a position to implement Necker's proposals, bore ultimate responsibility for their defeat, although his motives were

ill-founded rather than base:

Le roi ... avait toutes les vertus nécessaires pour être un monarque constitutionnel ... Mais quoiqu'il eût beaucoup d'instruction et qu'il lût surtout avec intérêt les historiens anglais, le descendant de Louis XVI avait de la peine à se départir de la doctrine du droit divin ... 115

The truly villainous were those who, acting exclusively out of self interest, guided the Revolution along its ever more radical course. Included in this rogues' gallery were Calonne ("aucun homme en particulier ne peut être considéré comme l'auteur de la révolution de France; mais si l'on voulait s'en prendre à un individu d'un événement séculaire, ce serait les fautes de M. Calonne qu'il faudrait en accuser"), 116 Mirabeau, 117 and Robespierre. 118

If this angle of approach is inherently incompatible with the perspectives previously explored, its presence in Mme. de Staël's treatise may nonetheless be explained. From a partisan standpoint, it mirrored the conservatives' ploy of singling out for attack specific leading "criminals" of the Revolution. 119 With Necker a favorite target of abuse, Mme. de Staël sought to vindicate her father by shifting the stigma of responsibility for the Revolution's excesses to his political enemies. The tactic often inspired outrageous moralizing:

On dirait qu'à toutes époques de l'histoire il y a des personnages qu'on peut considerer comme les représentants du bon et du mauvais principe ... tels furent M. Necker et Mirabeau en France ... 120

Philosophically, the Revolution seen as the assertion of individual wills was compatible with Mme. de Staël's liberal emphasis on human freedom and autonomy. Indeed the

tension between individual and suprapersonal levels of analysis proved a recurrent feature in liberal interpretations of the Revolution. Commenting on L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution, Raymond Aron observed, "There is, in Tocqueville, one level on which the necessity of historical movement appears and another level on which we rediscover the role of men."¹²¹ It remained, however, for Romantics like Carlyle to pay the revolutionary hero his highest tribute as the master of history.

Passions:

The psychological dimensions of the Revolution provided the focus for Mme. de Staël's 1796 essay, De l'influence des passions. Her later works drew upon its insights, but for its analytical dissection of the revolutionary mentalité it remains unsurpassed in her oeuvre. The attempt to relate revolutionary activity to a particular frame of mind may be viewed as an extension of Montesquieu's concept of principle. Whereas her mentor set out to identify the sustaining passions of stable political orders, Mme. de Staël adapted his category of analysis to diagnose the complementary phenomenon of revolutionary change. The psychological propellant of revolution, as indicated in the title of her essay, was passion. In its broadest sense, passion referred to an uncontrollable, insatiable and obsessive impulse: "cette force impulsive qui entraîne l'homme indépendamment de sa volonté."¹²² Thus Mme. de Staël's interpretation of the Revolution incor-

porated yet another irreconcilable angle of approach: by her focus on the passions, she implicitly denied the efficacy of human will (central to her "great men" theory) as well as the motive of class interest. The passions led men to misperceive their interests¹²³ and effectively blurred class distinctions: "Les passions rendent les hommes semblables entre eux, comme la fièvre jette dans le même état des tempéramens divers ..."124

It was to explain the extremist propensities of the Revolution that Mme. de Staël constructed her theory of the passions. She explicitly denied its applicability to the events of 1789 (her reference is to "vanity" but her argument applied across the board):

Je n'appellerai point vanité le mouvement qui a porté vingt-quatre millions d'hommes à ne pas vouloir des privilèges de deux cent milles; c'est la raison qui est soulevée, c'est la nature qui a repris son niveau ...125

Within the compass of her inquiry, she included both the revolutionary elite and the masses; she presented a psychological anatomy of extremism seen "from above" and "from below." This mode of approach was patently tendentious given the association of passion with intransigent extremism and Mme. de Staël's own commitment to "conciliatory politics" founded the moderate sentiments of natural virtue and self-interest. Her repudiation of the passions finalized the evolving break with the Cartesian view of passion as the essential principle of all human action.¹²⁶ By his rehabilitation of the passions from the stigma of

Christian theology, Descartes inspired philosophes like Diderot to champion passion as the indispensable impetus of man's highest achievements ("Il n'y a que les passions et les grands passions qui puissent élever l'âme aux grandes choses").¹²⁷ Yet this claim was founded on a conceptual muddle which conflated passion with sensibilité and emotion. As the eighteenth century drew on, the passions came to be more narrowly defined as violent impulses distinguished from the benign sentiments of compassion and virtue. The promptings of nature were never abandoned as a guide, but nature's message grew increasingly complex: if man continued to seek felicity, his passions were now considered inimical to its attainment. Diderot's mature writings¹²⁸ reflected this transformation, which was to receive its fullest expression in De l'influence des passions. Thus Mme. de Staël refused to equate the intense but ephemeral pleasures afforded by the passions with true bonheur, whether conceived as material well-being or melancholy satisfaction: "les passions.. voilà le véritable obstacle au bonheur individuel."¹²⁹ The apotheosis of passion as a destructive force came with its enlistment as the psychological mainspring of revolution.

Mme. de Staël identified six passions that specifically contributed to the radical course of the Revolution. To vanity -- the obsessive need to "faire effet" -- she attributed the demagogic appeals of the deputies and the frustration of political compromise:

... l'introduction des spectateurs dans la salle des délibérations a suffi seule pour changer la direction

des affaires en France. D'abord on n'accordoit aux applaudissemens que des phrases; bientôt, pour obtenir ces applaudissemens, on a cédé des principes, proposé des décrets, approuvé jusqu'à crimes ...¹³⁰

As distinguished from glory, dependent upon the approval of public opinion, ambition had power as its sole objective, "c'est à dire le droit d'influer sur les pensées extérieures et d'être loué partout où l'on commande."¹³¹ For the ambitious, success required tactical flexibility and aggressiveness coupled with a sensitivity to the shifting moods of the masses. Crime, frequently a means to the satisfaction of other passions, became an end in itself for the radical leaders of the Revolution who practiced cruelty without limit for its own sake. The passion was an expression of man's most perverse nature:

C'est une sensation physique transportée dans l'ordre morale, et même cette frénésie se manifeste assez ordinairement par des symptômes extérieures. Robespierre et la plupart de ses complices avoient habituellement des mouvemens convulsifs dans les mains, dans la tête; on voyoit en eux l'agitation d'un constant effort ...¹³²

The two passions ascribed specifically to the masses were envy and vengeance. Of the former, Mme. de Staël wrote, "l'envie prend sa source dans ce terrible sentiment de l'homme qui lui rend odieux le spectacle du bonheur qu'il ne possède pas, et lui feroit préférer l'égalité de l'enfer aux graditions dans la paradis;¹³³ this theme was later echoed in the Considérations.¹³⁴ Vengeance, on the other hand, was related to justice in that it issued as a response to poverty and oppression.¹³⁵ Political fanaticism (l'esprit de parti) held in thrall all extremists of the Revolu-

tion and counterrevolution. Mme. de Staël described it as a modern secular equivalent of religious fanaticism.¹³⁶

L'esprit de parti est une sorte de frénésie de l'âme qui ne tient point à la nature de son objet. C'est ne plus voir qu'une idée, lui rapporter tout, et n'apercevoir que ce qui peut s'y réunir.¹³⁷

It was the passion most intimately tied to revolution:

Il faut avoir vécu contemporain d'une révolution religieuse ou politique, pour savoir quelle est la force de cette passion. Elle est la seule dont la puissance ne se démontre pas également dans tous les temps et dans tous les pays ...¹³⁸

Political fanaticism differed markedly from the other passions examined. Purity of doctrine, a fundamental element in l'esprit de parti, played no role in ambition which required ideological flexibility, nor in passions like crime or envy rooted in blind instinct. The fanatic's claim to moral superiority found no equivalent in the other passions. Political fanaticism was further distinguished from ambition by an unconcern with practical political realities; to fanaticism, Mme. de Staël ascribed the self-defeating policies of the absolutists in the Constituent Assembly.¹³⁹

The weaknesses of Mme. de Staël's analysis of the passions are not difficult to discern. Her psychological anatomy of extremism relied on framework that was crude, tendentious and logically inconsistent. She defined passion as an overwhelming obsessive impulse, and then proceeded to ascribe several distinct passions to a single individual. How, for example, could Robespierre be motivated by crime, ambition and partisan spirit when these passions were by definition mutually incompatible? Her analysis

was openly disfigured by partisan apologetics; hence her qualitative distinction between the generous sentiments rallying the crowds to Necker in 1789 ("Les esprits étaient exaltés, mais il n'y avaient encore rien que de bon dans les âmes")¹⁴⁰ and the sinister passions rallying them to Robespierre in 1793.

For all its problems, Mme. de Staël's analysis of the passions ought not to be dismissed. It was valuable as an attempt to adapt Montesquieu's analytical tools to a revolutionary context. Through this framework, Mme. de Staël sought to come to grips with the irrational forces of her era without invoking the metaphysical explanations of reactionaries like de Maistre. Her focus on the passions had a profound impact on future revolutionary historiography; the role of the passions figured prominently in the works of thinkers as disparate as Taine and St. Simon. And if Mme. de Staël's inquiry fell considerably short of the sophisticated research of modern historians like Rudé and Cobb, she shared with them the conviction that the psychological dimension of the Revolution was worthy of investigation.

* * * *

Mme. de Staël's treatment of the French Revolution commands attention on a variety of levels. As a polemicist, she bequeathed a strategic legacy to the Restoration liberals. Her defense of the original aims of the Revolution and "balanced" interpretation of events informed the works

of Guizot, Royer-Collard and others. Her dual role as an apologist for the tiers and the noblesse contributed to tensions in her analysis, while her portrait of the Revolution as the political triumph of the tiers gave a bias to historical studies that continues to the present. The multiple dimensions of Mme. de Staël's analysis attest not only to her confusion, but also reveal a deep sensitivity to the complexities of history. She raised questions central to the concept of revolution: Can revolution be treated as a conceptual entity? Is it essentially creative or destructive? Does it inaugurate a new order, or merely restore or adapt an old? What spheres of society does it effect? What constitutes its motive forces. She called attention to the role of the intellectual as revolutionary, to the subversive contradiction between social function and privilege, and to the civic humanist and the constitutionalist dimensions of revolution. To be sure, these and other themes were to be more vigorously expounded subsequent thinkers, yet Mme. de Staël's contribution to their crystallization ought neither to be deprecated nor underestimated.

NOTES

- ¹Passions, p. 13.
- ²Mellon, Political Uses, ch. II, passim. In the present chapter, the term "liberal" applies to both the "doctrinaires" and "independants." Although certain political differences divided the two groups, both shared a similar allegiance to a constitutionalist state, the protection of civil liberties and a propertied suffrage.
- ³Cobban, Aspects, p. 256.
- ⁴Ibid., p. 93.
- ⁵George Rudé, The Crowd in the French Revolution (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1967).
- ⁶Richard Cobb, A Second Identity: Essays on France and French History (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- ⁷Des circonstances, p. 132.
- ⁸Considérations, I, pp. 141-42.
- ⁹Ibid., pp. 79-80.
- ¹⁰Réflexions sur la paix, p. 88.
- ¹¹Des circonstances, p. 165.
- ¹²Ibid., pp. 32-33.
- ¹³Considérations, I, p. 72.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 41.
- ¹⁵Des circonstances, p. 37.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 132-33.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 41.
- ¹⁸Considérations, II, Part V, ch. VII.
- ¹⁹See Cobban, Aspects, pp. 90-111.
- ²⁰Considérations, I, p. 5.
- ²¹Réflexions sur la paix, p. 45.

²²Mme. de Staël's interchangeable references to the feudal and absolutist past go far to explain the ambiguities noted in her definition of revolutionary change. While the events of 1789 symbolized a sweeping repudiation of absolutism, the degree of change was less marked in relation to feudalism.

²³Cobban, Aspects, pp. 95-99.

²⁴See Lettres sur Rousseau, p. 69, and Littérature, p. 39.

²⁵A valuable exposition of Barnave's theory of history is Ralph Miliband's "Barnave: A Case of Bourgeois Class Consciousness," in Aspects of History and Class Consciousness, ed. by Istvan Meszaros (N.Y.: Herder & Herder, 1972), pp. 22-48.

²⁶See Mellon, Political Uses, p. 5-30.

²⁷Frank Manuel, The New World of Henri St. Simon (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. 266.

²⁸Considérations, I, p. 247.

²⁹Ibid., p. 79.

³⁰See Bonald's criticism of Mme. de Staël cited in Mellon, Political Uses, p. 61.

³¹Considérations, I, p. 100.

³²Ibid., II, p. 207.

³³Ibid., I, p. 187.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 105-06.

³⁵Ibid., p. 106.

³⁶Ibid., p. 187.

³⁷Ibid., p. 107.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., II, pp. 240-41.

⁴⁰Ibid., I, pp. 46-47.

⁴¹Lettres sur Rousseau, p. 69.

- ⁴²Littérature, p. 392.
- ⁴³Considérations, I, p. 107.
- ⁴⁴Ibid., p. 26.
- ⁴⁵Considérations, I, p. 5.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 38-43.
- ⁴⁷See for example, C.B.A. Behrens, "Making the Revolution," The New York Review of Books, March 25, 1971, pp. 38-40.
- ⁴⁸Considérations, I, p. 39.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 89.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 115-16.
- ⁵¹Ibid., Part II, chs. XIII and XIV.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 228.
- ⁵³Ibid., p. 29.
- ⁵⁴Cobban, Aspects, pp. 27--71.
- ⁵⁵Pierre Goubert, The Old Regime (N.Y.:Harper & Row, 1973).
- ⁵⁶George Taylor, "Noncapitalist Wealth and the Origins of the French Revolution," American Historical Review, LXXII (1967), pp. 469-96.
- ⁵⁷François Bluche, L'origine des magistrats du Parlement de Paris aux XVIII^e siècle (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956)
- ⁵⁸Jean Egret, "L'aristocratie parlementaire française à la fin de l'ancien régime," Revue Historique, CCVIII (July-Sept. 1952), pp. 1-17.
- ⁵⁹Vivian Gruder, The Royal Provincial Intendants (N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968).
- ⁶⁰Georges Lefebvre, Études Orléanaises I: Contribution à l'étude des structures sociales à la fin du XVIII^e siècle (Paris: Commission d'histoire économique et sociale de la Révolution, 1962).
- ⁶¹Considérations, I, p. 183.
- ⁶²Ibid., p. 199.

- ⁶³Ibid., p. 285.
- ⁶⁴Grange, Necker, pp. 119-20.
- ⁶⁵Considérations, I, p. 285.
- ⁶⁶Ibid., p. 163.
- ⁶⁵Considérations, I, p. 285.
- ⁶⁶Ibid., p. 163.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., p. 300.
- ⁶⁸S. Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1967), ch. VII.
- ⁶⁹Olwen H. Hufton, The Poor of Eighteenth Century France (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- ⁷⁰See Robert Darnton, "Poverty, Crime and Revolution," The New York Review of Books, October 2, 1975, pp. 17-22.
- ⁷¹Albert Soboul, The French Revolution 1787-1799 (N.Y.: Random House, 1975).
- ⁷²Louis Chevalier, Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century (N.Y.: Howard Fertig, 1973).
- ⁷³Jeffrey Kaplow, The Names of Kings: The Parisian Laboring Poor in the Eighteenth Century (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1972).
- ⁷⁴Rudé, Crowd.
- ⁷⁵Considérations, I, p. 45.
- ⁷⁶Thus Mme. de Staël alluded to the wisdom of Necker's proposal for the creation of provincial assemblies (Considérations, I, Part I, ch. VI). However her position is confused by the fact that elsewhere in the treatise she spoke of the byzantine complexity of laws and regulations under the Old Regime (I, p. 149).
- ⁷⁷See ch. III.
- ⁷⁸Considérations, I, p. 9.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., p. 46.
- ⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 71-2.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 77-8.

⁸²Ibid., p. 74.

⁸³Ibid., p. 77.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 78.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 72.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 60.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 78.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 77.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 61.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 75.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁹²George Taylor, "Revolutionary and Nonrevolutionary Content in the Cahiers of 1789: An Interim Report," French Historical Studies, Vol. VII, No. 4, Fall 1972.

⁹³Considerations, I, Part I, ch. XIV.

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 118-19.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 113.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 158.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 162.

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 22-3.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 283.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 297.

- 107 Ibid., p. 242.
- 108 Ibid., p. 249.
- 109 Ibid., p. 283.
- 110 Ibid., p. 297.
- 111 Réflexions sur la paix, p. 45.
- 112 Considérations, I, p. 160.
- 113 For example, ibid., p. 222.
- 114 Ibid., p. 31.
- 115 Ibid., p. 120.
- 116 Ibid., p. 62.
- 117 Ibid., p. 136.
- 118 Ibid., p. 297.
- 119 Mellon, Political Uses, p. 71.
- 120 Considérations, I, p. 136.
- 121 Aron, Main Currents, I, p. 277.
- 122 Passions, p. 9.
- 123 Des circonstances, p. 246.
- 124 Passions, p. 162.
- 125 Ibid., p. 110.
- 126 Robert Mauzi, L'idée de bonheur aux XVIII^e siècle (Paris: Armand Colin, 1969), p. 437.
- 127 Diderot, Pensées philosophiques, in Oeuvres philosophiques, ed. by P. Vernière (Paris: Editions Garnier Freres, 1964), pp. 9-10.
- 128 Mauzi, Bonheur, pp. 439-42.
- 129 Passions, p. 9.
- 130 Ibid., p. 111.
- 131 Ibid., p. 71.

132 Ibid., p. 184.

133 Ibid., p. 152.

134 Considérations, I, p. 283.

135 Passions, p. 153.

136 Ibid., p. 161.

137 Ibid., p. 168.

138 Ibid., p. 159.

139 Ibid., p. 163.

140 Considérations, I, p. 128.

CONCLUSION

The history of Staëlian scholarship has been characterized by a marked imbalance: as a literary figure Mme. de Staël had consistently engaged critical attention, while as a political thinker she has aroused little interest. The reasons for the relative neglect of her political thought are easily discerned; she paid little heed to the formal demands of logical consistency and much attention to the strategic imperatives of partisan politics. It has been the premise of this dissertation that these qualities do not preclude taking Mme. de Staël seriously as a political theorist. To perceive her ambivalences simply as the product of a spontaneous and undisciplined mind is to underestimate her acute sensitivity to the complex traditions of theorizing that she self-consciously sought to accommodate, synthesize or transform. Her profound intellectual predicament as a figure at the cross-roads of eighteenth and nineteenth century cultures cannot fail to be obscured by facile assessments such as that of Guy de la Batut:

L'esprit liberal qui l'anima était aussi un sentiment pour elle, plutôt que l'effet d'un jugement raisonné et précis; il lui permit bien souvent de donner libre cours à sa sensibilité ...¹

Not the least valuable aspect of Mme. de Staël's political thought is its bold communication of the intellectual ten-

sions which characterized her age. From an opposing perspective, knowledge of the theoretical traditions that nourished Mme. de Staël's work serves to caution against overestimating the originality of her contributions: this study has exposed the difficulties with Stanley Mellon's claim that she "discovered" the historical dimensions of liberal politics, as well as the problems with Steven Golin's attempt to rank her a precursor of socialist realism. If Mme. de Staël's achievements as a theorist were, in fact, more modest, they nonetheless establish a compelling claim on our attentions.

Throughout the course of her career, Mme. de Staël addressed many of the perennial questions of political theory: What is the character of the common good? What are the conditions of political stability? What are the respective claims of public and private life? What are the mechanisms of social and political change? What is the relation of history to politics? Mme. de Staël's answers to these queries were often riddled with contradictions, yet the richness of her arguments and the suggestiveness of her hypotheses more than compensated for her theoretical failings. Her exploration of the concept of historical progress illuminated its manifold dimensions, reassessed its implications for the realm of literature, and advanced the theory that modernity, domesticity and a valuation of negative liberty were inextricably linked. Moreover she was among the first to perceive that the instruments of progress could be perverted to exploit rather than to perfect mankind. As a political sociologist,

Mme. de Staël sought to adapt Montesquieu's model of a free society to the post-Revolutionary era. She shared with her master a methodological apparatus societal in scope, along with a conviction that the demands of political citizenship must be reconciled with the claims of self-interest. Her depiction of the "public" and "private" aspects of such institutions of the national debt and the hereditary monarchy ingeniously symbolized her complex vision of a free society. Her attempt to chart a middle course between the extremes of reaction and radical revolution directly fed the stream of juste-milieu theorizing under the Restoration. Her portrait of Napoleonic despotism was among the first to emphasize the specifically modern attributes of that political type. The Considérations sur la Révolution française displayed Mme. de Staël's keen appreciation of the complexities of historical evaluation, as well as contained fertile hypotheses on the nature of revolutionary change. Her studies of Italy, Germany, and Russia provoked widespread intellectual controversy and debate. While the tensions in her theoretical perspective gave early expression to many of the dominant strands of nineteenth century thought: liberalism, positivism, idealism, romanticism and historicism.

Mme. de Staël's sexual self-consciousness contributed much to the originality of her hypotheses, yet also led to the narrowing of her intellectual vision. Its positive influence on her thought may be seen in her focus on the woman-centered household as an instrument of historical progress; her emphasis on the woman's role in the development of certain

literary genres; her association of domesticity with free political institutions; and her sensitivity to the "tyranny" of social pressure on the superior woman. Although an advocate of social reform, Mme. de Staël rebelled against the "radical" feminism of Condorcet or Wollstonecraft. Her concern for individual self-expression was generally confined to the woman of superior talents, and she explicitly rejected arguments for the extension of the suffrage. Because the woman's domestic role served as the cornerstone of her liberal sociology, Mme. de Staël could not advance beyond a narrowly elitist form of feminism.

Finally, Mme. de Staël merits recognition as the precursor of a new political type: the intellectual engagé. Not only did she pursue a political career and enjoy a highly visible public profile, but she consciously reflected on her role and reserved an eminent place for the politically committed intellectual in her ideal society. I have examined at length how her sensitivity to the newly emergent force of public opinion and the exigencies of practical politics figured in her writings. Under the Restoration, this new breed of scholar-activist would flourish.

If elements of Mme. de Staël's political vision have not survived the twentieth century, there still remains much that is vital in her legacy. This dissertation has attempted to uncover the enduring strands in her thought, and claim for her a modest but secure place in the history of political philosophy.

NOTES

¹Talma, Correspondance avec Mme. de Staël, ed. by
Guy de la Batut (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1928), p. 16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. WORKS BY MME. DE STAËL

- _____. Oeuvres complètes. Edited by Baron de Staël. 17 vols. Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1820.
- _____. Carnets de voyage. Edited by Simone Balayé. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1971.
- _____. Considérations sur la Révolution française. 2 vols. Paris: Charpentier, 1862.
- _____. De l'Allemagne. Edited by Jean de Pange. 5 vols. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1958.
- _____. Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution française. Edited by J. Vienot. Paris: Fischbacher, 1904.
- _____. Dix années d'exil. Introduction and notes by Simone Balayé. Paris: Bibliothèque 10:18, 1966.

II. CORRESPONDENCE

- Staël, Germaine de. Correspondance générale. Edited by B. Jasinski. 3t. in 5 vols. Paris: J.J. Pauvert, 1962-68.
- _____. Lettres de Mme. de Staël à Benjamin Constant. Edited by Baronne Nolde. Paris: Kra, 1928.
- Talma. Correspondance avec Mme. de Staël. Edited by Guy de la Batut. Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1928.

III. BIOGRAPHIES & GENERAL WORKS ON MME. DE STAËL

- d'Andlau, B. La jeunesse de Mme. de Staël. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970.
- Blennerhasset, (Lady). Mme. de Staël et son temps. 3 vols. Paris: Westhausser, 1890.
- Herold, J.C. Mistress to an Age. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958
- Lang, A. Une vie d'orages: Germaine de Staël. Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1959.

- Kohler, P. Mme. de Staël et la Suisse. Lausanne: Payot, 1916.
- Necker de Saussure, Mme. Notice sur le caractère et les écrits de Mme. de Staël. in Mme. de Staël. Oeuvres complètes. Vol. I. Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1820.
- Sorel, A. Mme. de Staël. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1907.
- III. WORKS TREATING SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF MME. DE STAËL'S THOUGHT
- Balayé, S. "Mme. de Staël, Napoleon et l'indépendance italienne." Revue des sciences humaines (Janvier, 1969).
- Escarpit, R. L'Angleterre dans l'oeuvre de Mme. de Staël. Paris: Didier, 1954.
- Gautier, Paul. Mme. de Staël et Napoléon. Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1902.
- Gennari, G. Le premier voyage de Mme. de Staël en Italie et la genèse de Corinne. Paris: Bovin, 1947.
- Golin, S. "Mme. de Staël and the Rejection of Happiness: A Study in the End of the Enlightenment." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1968.
- _____. "Mme. de Staël: Culture as Social Control." The Review of Politics (Fall, 1975). pp. 342-59.
- Gwynne, G.E. Mme. de Staël et la Révolution française. Paris: A-G Nizet, 1969.
- Houssonville, Comte d'. Mme. de Staël et l'Allemagne. Paris: Galman-Levy, 1928.
- Luppé, R. Les idées littéraires de Mme. de Staël et l'héritage des lumières. Paris: J. Vrin, 1969.
- Moers, E. "Mme. de Staël and the Woman of Genius." American Scholar. (Spring, 1975) pp. 225-41.
- Munteano, B. Les idées politiques de Mme. de Staël et la Constitution de l'an III. Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1931.
- Ollion, E. Les idées politiques, morales et pédagogiques de Mme. de Staël. Macon: Protrart freres, 1910.
- Pange, Comtesse de. Mme. de Staël et la découverte de l'Allemagne. Paris: Malfere, 1929.

- Poulet, G. "La pensée critique de Mme. de Staël." Preuves, No. 16 (Dec., 1966), pp. 27-35.
- St. Onge, S. "Evolution of the Religious Thought in the Works of Mme. de Staël." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1971.
- Trail, M.C. "Mme. de Staël: Her Russian-Swedish Journey." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1946.

PROCEEDINGS, JOURNALS:

Cahiers Staëliens.

Colloque de Coppet: Mme. de Staël et l'Europe. Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1970.

Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France. 66 année No. 1 consacré à Mme. de Staël et Benjamin Constant (jan.-mars, 1966).

OTHER SECONDARY SOURCES CONSULTED

- Arendt, H. The Origins of Totalitarianism. Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1958.
- Aron, R. Main Currents in Sociological Thought. 2 volumes. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1968.
- Ascomb, F. Anglophobia in France. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1950.
- Bagge, D. Les idées politiques en France sous la Restauration. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952.
- Bastid, P. Sieyès et sa pensée. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1970.
- Behrens, C.B.A. "Making the Revolution." The New York Review of Books. March 25, 1971, pp. 38-41.
- Bluche, F. L'origine des magistrats de Parlement de Paris aux XVIII^e siècle. Paris: les Belles Lettres, 1956.
- Bonno, G. La constitution britannique devant l'opinion française de Montesquieu à Bonaparte. Paris: Champion, 1932.

- Carcassone, E. Montesquieu et le problème de la constitution française au XVIII^e siècle. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1927.
- Chevalier, L. Labouring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century. New York: Howard Fertig, 1973.
- Cobb, R. A Second Identity: Essays on France and French History. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Cobban, A. Aspects of the French Revolution. New York: George Braziller, 1968.
- Crocker, L. An Age of Crisis: Man and His World in Eighteenth Century French Thought. Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959.
- Darnton, R. "Poverty, Crime and Revolution." The New York Review of Books. October 2, 1975, pp. 17-22.
- Descotes, M. La Légende de Napoléon et les écrivains français du XIX^e siècle. Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1967.
- Egret, J. "L'aristocratie parlementaire française à la fin de l'ancien régime." Revue Historique, CCVIII (July-Sept., 1952), pp. 1-17.
- Ford, F. Robe and Sword. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953.
- Frankel, C. The Faith of Reason. New York: Octagon Books, 1969.
- Friedrich, G.J.; Curtis, M.; and Barber, B. Totalitarianism in Perspective: Three Views. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969.
- Gay, P. The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. 2 vols. New York: Alfred A Knof, 1969.
- _____. Voltaire's Politics. New York: Random House, 1965.
- Goubert, P. The Old Regime. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Grange, H. Les idées de Necker. Paris: Klincksieck, 1974.
- Gruder, V. The Royal Intendants. New York: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Gusdorf, G. Les principes de la pensée au siècle des lumières. Paris: Payot, 1971.
- Harpaz, E. L'école Libérale sous la Restauration. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968.

- Hufton, O. The Poor of Eighteenth Century France: 1750-89. New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Kaplow, J. The Name of Kings: The Parisian Laboring Poor in the Eighteenth Century. New York: Basic Books, 1972.
- Kateb, G. Political Theory. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968.
- Kelly, G.A. "Liberalism and the Aristocracy in the French Restoration." Journal of the History of Ideas. No. 26 (1965), pp. 509-30.
- Kettler, D. The Social and Political Thought of Adam Ferguson. Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1965.
- Kraminck, I. Bolingbroke and his Circle. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Laurenson, D. and Swingewood, A. The Sociology of Literature.
- Lefebvre, G. The Thermidorians and the Directory. New York: Random House, 1964.
- Lichtheim, G. The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays New York: Random House, 1969.
- Lotholary, A. Les philosophes de XVIII^e siècle et la Russe. Paris: Bovin, 1951.
- Macpherson, C.B. The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke. New York, Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Manuel, F. The New World of Henri St. Simon. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964.
- _____. The Prophets of Paris. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Mauzi, R. L'idée de bonheur aux XVIII^e siècle. Paris: Armand Colin, 1969.
- Mellon, S., ed. François Guizot: Historical Essays and Lectures. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- _____. The Political Uses of History. Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958.
- Neumann, F. The Democratic and Authoritarian State. New York: Free Press, 1964.
- Palmer, P. "The Concept of Public Opinion in Political Theory." Essays in History and Political Theory in Honor of C.H. McIlwain. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936.

- Palmer, R.R. The Age of Democratic Revolution. 2 vols. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959.
- Fassmore, J. The Perfectibility of Man. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.
- Pitkin, H. The Concept of Representation. Calif.: University of California Press, 1967.
- Flamenatz, J. Man and Society. 2 vols. New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1963.
- Pocock, J.G.A. The Machiavellian Moment. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975.
- _____. Politics, Language, and Time. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1971.
- Reboul, P. Le mythe Anglais dans la littérature française sous la Restauration. Lille: Bibliothèque Universitaire de Lille, 1962.
- Reynier, G. La femme au XVII^e siècle. Paris: Flon, 1933.
- Richter, M. "Despotism." Dictionary of the History of Ideas.
_____, ed. Essays in History and Theory: An Approach to the Social Sciences. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- _____. "Montesquieu on Comparative and Natural Law." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, Sept. 4-8, 1973.
- _____, ed. The Political Theory of Montesquieu. New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.
- _____. "Tocqueville's Contribution to the Theory of Revolution," in Nomos VIII: Revolution. Edited by C.J. Freidrich. New York: Atherton Press, 1966.
- Rotenstreich, N. "The Idea of Historical Progress." History and Theory, X, No.2 (1971), pp. 197-221.
- Rothkurg, L. Opposition to Louis XIV. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965.
- Rudé, G. The Crowd in the French Revolution. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Ruggiero, G. de. The History of European Liberalism. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.
- Sartori, G. Democratic Theory. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1965.

- Schaar, J. "Some Ways of Thinking About Equality." The Journal of Politics XXVI (1964), pp. 867-95.
- Schumpeter, J. Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Shackleton, R. Montesquieu: A Critical Biography. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Soboul, A. The French Revolution 1787-1799. New York: Random House, 1975.
- Sorel, G. The Illusions of Progress. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Starzinger, V. Middlingness: Juste Milieu Political Theory in France and England. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1965.
- Taylor, G. "Noncapitalist Wealth and the Origins of the French Revolution." American Historical Review, LXXII (1967), pp. 469-96.
- _____. "Revolutionary and Nonrevolutionary Content in the Cahiers of 1789: An Interim Report." French Historical Studies, VII, No. 4 (Fall, 1972). 479-502.
- Touchard, J., ed. Histoire des idées politiques. 2 vols. Presses Universitaires de France, 1959.
- Vile, M.J.C. Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers.
- Von Mohrenschildt, D. Russia in the Intellectual Life of Eighteenth Century France. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936.
- Vyverberg, H. Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955.
- Welleck, R. A History of Modern Criticism. 4 vols. Conn.: Yale University Press, 1955.
- Wolf, R.P. "Beyond Tolerance." A Critique of Pure Tolerance. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Wolin, S. Politics and Vision. Boston: Little, Brown Co., 1960.
- Woloch, I. Jacobin Legacy. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970.