

inevitable. Had there been no fiscal crisis—which was quite independent of the crisis of identity among the elite—it might not have happened. But, in its plight, the threatened elite developed an idea that provided the inspiration for the Revolution, and none but this idea could make the Revolution what it was.

The constant threat to its status, undermined by the loss of political influence, the swelling of ranks of the nobility and the inflation of titles, which could be bought for money and made ancient nobility legally equal to a low-born *officier* barely washed by his “soap for scum,” and the contemptuous attitude of the Crown, had dire consequences for the society whose elite was affected in this manner. In the eighteenth century, the nobility was prepared to renounce the formal dignity which concealed the lack of dignity in fact, and ready to reorganize and redefine itself. In the process of such redefinition, it stumbled upon the idea of the nation. This idea was one of several devices the members of the order utilized to protect it from further assault. Once advanced, it acquired a life of its own, and its very success was to doom its noble champions. France as a nation owes its birth to the nobility, which was almost immediately sacrificed to and devoured by its ungrateful offspring. It was hardly possible to foresee that following such an enticing ideal would bring its advocates onto a suicidal path.

The Birth of the French Nation

The malaise of the French elite was the major factor in the development of the French national consciousness and the emergence of the French nation. It made the aristocracy sympathetic to the idea of the “people” as the bearer of sovereignty and a fundamentally positive entity. This revolution in attitudes was a logical outcome of the situation in which the nobility found itself by the end of the seventeenth century. Its privileges, the significance of which lay in their exclusiveness, were becoming less and less exclusive; of political influence it had as little as any other group in the population; it perceived itself as “degraded,” reduced to the “people.” There were basically two ways for the nobility to reclaim the status which it was losing: to dissociate itself unequivocally from the “people,” or to redefine the “people” in such a way that being of it would become an honor rather than a disgrace. The nobility never committed itself entirely to either one of these solutions, pursuing both all through the eighteenth century. But the second solution, the idea of the nation, had important advantages over the first, and it is not surprising that in the end it was the one that triumphed. It came with its own stratification, which reflected a new hierarchy of values. Within the community defined as a nation, status was based on service to the nation, merit. Unlike the conflicting criteria of birth or wealth, merit made all the

groups within the nobility as well as those aspiring to enter it eligible to partake in high status, and, unlike culture, service was self-justifiable.

The realization that the idea of the nation was advantageous in the situation of the nobility brought to the surface and accelerated a subterranean process which had been going on for generations since the sixteenth century, at certain moments more visible than at others, but ever in danger of dying out: the emergence of the “state” as the sphere of the sacred and the new focus of loyalty. This idea was articulated and promulgated by the representatives of the Crown, and by the second half of the seventeenth century was absorbed by the collective mind of the nobility. At the same time, the meaning the “state” had for the authors of the idea, of an attribute and embodiment of the royal authority, and its virtual identity with the person of the king, came under attack. During the *Fronde* and the later years of Louis XIV's reign, the “state” was consistently redefined as the native population of France, or the French nation (in the neutral, literal sense of the word). In the early eighteenth century, spokesmen of the French elite joined to these elements of the indigenous tradition the value attached to the “nation” in England, where it had already become the ultimate source of authority and the object of supreme devotion (though without necessarily adopting the other aspects of the English idea). Thus upgraded, the state, alias nation, alias people of France, was finally freed from dependence on the king and became the symbol around which opposition to the Crown could rally and in the name of which the righting of wrongs could be legitimately and righteously demanded. This amalgam of native and imported concepts became the basis on which the unique idea of the *French nation* later developed.

The effect of the idea of the nation was analogous to that of the doctrine of Divine Right: like the latter, it both caused and signified a dramatic alteration in the meaning of French identity and soon changed the reality of the French polity. “Behind their faces I see other men and in the same realm another state. The form remains, but the interior has been renewed. There has occurred a moral revolution, a change of spirit.” These words of Guez de Balzac, written when Richelieu first attempted to represent France as a polity, equally well describe its transformation into a nation. The change was striking and seemed to have come unannounced. “Suddenly,” writes Simon Schama, “subjects were told they had become Citizens; an aggregate of subjects held in place by injustice and intimidation had become a Nation.”¹⁴⁴ In fact, this process had been under way for close to a century, but it was tortuous, driven more by the desire to escape a certain condition than by a determination to reach a particular destination; and its final outcome was at no point predictable. The revolutionary idea itself was not entirely new. It was superimposed on and incorporated ideas that had constituted Frenchness earlier. The French identity, which in the eighteenth century be-

came national, was a layered identity, and the elements that composed different layers were not necessarily consistent with each other. Moreover, the specifically national component of the French identity, namely the specific meaning attached to nationality in France, was itself a result of a compromise, or perhaps only a truce, between different conflicting tendencies.

England as a Model

The concept "nation" was imported from England, but it was grafted on a body of indigenous traditions which gave it a unique twist and led the French nation away from the example on which it was initially modeled. The hybrid concept that resulted was further modified by a peculiar tension, a sense of inadequacy, in the incipient French national consciousness, introduced into it by the first nationalists who compared France with England and stressed the latter's superiority.

England was the only nation at the time, and it emphasized its nationality. It was also a country which offered the unusual spectacle of an almost instantaneous transformation from a peripheral, rather backward society torn by internal conflict into the greatest economic and political power in Europe, stable, proud, and enlightened, a formidable presence. For a while, around the middle of the eighteenth century, England was an object of general admiration in France, the state of affairs attested to by Voltaire's *Lettres anglaises* and other works, as well as by the popularity of English gardens and tea. The fashionableness of everything English was, with charming naïveté, expressed by Mlle de l'Espinasse, who confessed: "Il n'y a que la gloire de Voltaire qui pourrait me consoler de ne pas être née Anglaise."¹⁴⁵ The corollary of this admiration was unremitting self-criticism; some westward-looking Frenchmen found little if anything to be proud of in the country of their birth, so much so that sometimes they would rather not consider themselves a part of it. Inconsolate, they sought escape in cosmopolitanism.

The *philosophes* were above particularistic self-content and refused to allow an accident of birth to dictate to them what their commitments should be. Voltaire thought that "a philosopher has no *patrie* and belongs to no faction" and that "every man is born with the natural right to choose his *patrie* for himself." Abbé Raynal believed that "the *patrie* of a great man is the universe." Great men, explained Duclos, "men of merit, whatever the nation of their origin, form one nation among themselves. They are free of puerile national vanity. They leave it to the vulgar, to those who, having no personal glory, have to content themselves with the glory of their countrymen."¹⁴⁶

And yet these were the architects of the French national consciousness, and it was the *nationality* of England, the "constitution" that made it a *nation*, the political culture and institutions of a free *people*, that excited the

admiration of the *philosophes*. The foundations of English nationalism—the reinterpretation of the *people* which implied the basic equality of the great and the small, the glowing symbols of civil and political liberty—became the values of the French opinion-leaders who urged patriotism in the new, English sense of the word.

For a brief period England eclipsed classical antiquity as the model for France. England was the land of freedom. Even Rousseau, though but in a footnote and in conspicuous inconsistency with his general opinion of England, let slip from his pen that "the English of today . . . are nearer liberty than any one else."¹⁴⁷ In the eighth of his *Lettres anglaises*, "Sur le parlement d'Angleterre," the more consistent Voltaire hailed England as the paragon of civic virtues, whose constitution was infinitely preferable to that of Rome. The "essential difference between Rome and England, which gives the advantage entirely to the latter," he thought, was "that the outcome of the civil wars in Rome was slavery, while that of the troubles in England liberty. The English nation is the only nation upon earth that has been able to limit the power of kings by resisting them, and which, by joint efforts, has at last established that wise government where the prince is all-powerful to do good, and, at the same time, restrained from doing evil, where the nobles are great without insolence and without vassals, and where the people participate in government without confusion." Voltaire recognized that the liberty—and strength—of England rested on the respect for the *people*, the "plebeians," who in some crucial respect were treated as equal to the lords. His admiration was not devoid of an ulterior motive. The perceptive *philosophe* was particularly impressed by the consideration enjoyed by the English men of letters. He dwelt on this theme in several of his *Lettres anglaises*, noting that "this advantage is the necessary result of the form of their government,"¹⁴⁸ and stressed the difference between the dignified position of English intellectuals and the unenviable-by-comparison state of their slighted brethren in France.

If Voltaire concentrated upon the civil liberty of the English citizens, Montesquieu emphasized their political liberty. His opinion of England was hardly unqualified praise; there is little that is unqualified in Montesquieu. But he did regard England as the model of the free state. The English constitution guaranteed political liberty because of the checks it placed on the exercise of power. This "beautiful system," he claimed, was of Germanic origin; it was "invented in the woods," and therefore originally was as much French as English. But in France it gave way to absolutism. The English, in distinction, had preserved it in its pristine form. This implied that the rights of the aristocracy in England were never infringed upon; respect for its privileges ensured its interest in the liberty of all. "In a state there are always persons distinguished by their birth, riches or honors: But were they to be confounded with the common people, and to have only the weight of a

single vote like the rest, the common liberty would be their slavery, and they would have no interest in supporting it . . . The share they have therefore in the legislature ought to be proportioned to the other advantages they have in the state; which happens only when they form a body that has a right to put a stop to the enterprises of the people, as a people has a right to put a stop to theirs." This was exactly the situation in England. The unchallenged preeminence of the nobility did not prevent, but in fact was conducive to, the feeling of fellowship between it and the people. "Those dignities, which make the fundamental part of the constitution, are more fixed than elsewhere," Montesquieu thought; "but on the other hand, the great in this country of liberty, are nearer upon the level with the people; their ranks are more separated, and their persons are more confounded." Of course, the English had the advantage of an atrocious climate, which made them immune to the danger of enslavement. "Slavery," argued Montesquieu, "is ever preceded by sleep . . . But a people who find no rest in any situation . . . and feel nothing but pain, can hardly be lulled to sleep."¹⁴⁹ Less fortunate nations, like France, were an easier prey for tyrants. Nevertheless Montesquieu believed they ought to make an effort and follow the example of England, for, among other things, the life of the great in it was great, and this was worth a little cut in sleep.

The dignity of the elite, whether plebeian or patrician in origin; the strength of the state; and *nationality* appeared interrelated. And leaders of the French elite cast yearning glances at the greener grass of Albion and popularized the idea of the nation in hope that France would become a nation too. The example of England only accelerated the process of the symbolic elevation of the *people*, inspired by the structural changes within French society; but it was because of England that "nation," rather than "state" or *patrie*, the already charged concepts with a much longer history in France, became the name under which this rising deity was to be worshipped.

Nationalization of Patriotism

The substitution of a national identity, whose source was membership in a civil society composed of citizens, for one derived from being a subject of the French king was a long and gradual process which proceeded by imperceptible stages. The inherited ideas died slowly. In 1715 the image of the king as the object of supreme allegiance, the embodiment of the sacred, and the state personified still seemed intact. "The king is the visible image of God on earth," asserted the Parlement of Paris that year. "The whole State is in him, the will of the people is enclosed in his will." Around 1750, wrote Daniel Mornet, the new ideas "had barely penetrated life . . . nothing seemed to have changed, or so very little." Yet, in 1754, the Marquis

d'Argenson observed that "never before were the names of Nation and State evoked as often as today. These two words were never pronounced under Louis XIV, and one hardly knew what they meant."¹⁵⁰

The new concepts that reflected the birth of a new spirit may be said to have finally entered the discourse.¹⁵¹ The spirit manifested itself in print. Inspired perhaps by the translation of Bolingbroke's *Idea of a Patriot King*, anonymously published in French in 1750 under the title of *Lettres sur l'esprit de patriotisme et sur l'idée d'un roi patriote*, French writers busily wrote tracts which exhorted their countrymen to patriotism. The scale of values changed. In 1751 Rousseau devoted an essay to the subject of "virtue most necessary for heroes," in which he urged the French to abandon the vain pursuit of glory, and the show of bravery so characteristic of the noble code of conduct, for *l'amour de la Patrie*, which alone deserved to be considered a truly heroic quality. "The love of glory is responsible for a great deal of both good and evil; the love of the *patrie* is purer in its principle and surer in its effects, and while the world has been often oversupplied with heroes, nations will never have enough citizens . . . No, I will not grant the crown of heroism to the bravery of our fellow citizens who had shed their blood for their country, but to their ardent love for the *Patrie*, and to their invincible constancy in adversity." In his other writings, however, Rousseau saw patriotism and glory not as opposed but as inseparably connected. Grimm, too, regretted that "no germ of greatness, no idea of patriotism and true glory," was to be perceived in the young Frenchmen of his day. This appears to be a representative position. Glory, a legacy of the king's state, was becoming a French *national* characteristic. "Ah!" a citizen was to exclaim later, "how could one be French and not love it!"¹⁵²

While some lamented the lack of patriotism among Frenchmen, a certain Basset de la Marelle, in a work entitled *Différence du patriotisme national chez les Français et chez les Anglais*, contended in 1762 that his countrymen were more patriotic than the English. Some years later C. A. Rossel, the patriotic lawyer, drew a similar comparison between France and Rome, and also concluded that love of country was more characteristic of the former.¹⁵³ The humiliating experience of the Seven Years' War stimulated the growth of national patriotism among the French elite and probably contributed to its deeper penetration into the hardened hearts of lesser Frenchmen. In the literature, the sentiment was glorified. In comparison with it, less public virtues appeared banal. "I think that in establishing the hierarchy of virtues," wrote Condorcet to Turgot in 1773, "one has to put justice, charity, *l'amour de la patrie*, courage (not that of war, which is characteristic of all the farm-yard dogs), hatred of tyrants, far above chastity, marital fidelity, sobriety." At about the same time, Rousseau, possibly with an eye to his own immortality, advised his Polish audience: "Imitate the magnanimity of the Romans . . . to shower proofs of their gratitude upon those who . . . had rendered

them outstanding services: foreigners, Roman subjects, slaves, animals even . . . The men so distinguished should remain . . . the favorite sons of the fatherland . . . even if they happen to be scoundrels."¹⁵⁴

Changes in Vocabulary

The change of sentiment was reflected in the change of vocabulary and was noticeable as early as 1715. According to a limited but representative sample of the ARTFL data-base of French literature, between 1710 and 1720, and then again between 1750 and 1760, there occurred a significant increase in the employment of the related concepts *nation*, *peuple*, *patrie*, and *état*, which signified the transfer of loyalty to the community and the nationalization of discourse.¹⁵⁵

Between 1700 and 1710, the word *nation* was used in the literature only 45 times, in 7 volumes out of a corpus of 20. In the next decade it was employed 106 times, in 12 volumes out of 25. Its use steadily increased, going up sharply between 1751 and 1760, when it appeared in 990 instances in 43 out of 95 volumes, and thereafter remaining at this high level.¹⁵⁶ The word *peuple*, which was used 376 times between 1701 and 1710 in 12 volumes, in the next decade appeared 1,782 times in 19 texts, and after 1760 became even more frequent.¹⁵⁷ The word *patrie* jumped from a low of 34 instances (used sparsely in 12 texts) per decade (1701–1710) to 279 in 14 texts between 1711 and 1720; between 1751 and 1760 it appeared 462 times, being employed in 48 volumes; there were 658 instances (in 61 texts) between 1761 and 1770, and 806 (in 40 volumes) between 1781 and 1790.¹⁵⁸ A similar increase can be observed in the use of the word *état*, although in this case, owing to the multiple meanings of the word, plain numbers are less helpful.¹⁵⁹

The four terms were used interchangeably, as near synonyms. In 1690, the *Dictionnaire universel* of the Abbé Furetière defined *nation* as "a collective name that refers to a great people inhabiting a certain extent of land, enclosed within certain borders, or under the same authorities." The examples were the French, the Romans, the Cannibals. "Nation" thus was closely akin to "people" and related to the state (government) and territory. Every nation, according to Furetière, had a special character. The dictionary also mentioned, among other meanings of the word, that of people belonging to the same profession and "nations" of the university. The separate entry *national* defined it as "whatever concerns an entire nation."¹⁶⁰ The *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* of 1732 added to this definition but an example of "a nation of critics, well-known to every author," and an explanation that the plural "nations" in the Scriptures refers to infidel peoples who do not recognize the true God.¹⁶¹ The 1777 dictionary of the Academy, in its definition of *nation*, emphasized the constitutive role of the state. This "collective

term," according to it, applied to "all the inhabitants of the same state, the same country, who live under the same laws, speak the same language, etc." However, it also defined as a "nation" "inhabitants of the same country, even if they do not live under the same laws, and are the subjects of different princes."¹⁶² The *Nouveau dictionnaire françois* of 1793 reprinted the entry in the academic dictionary, but made an important addition to it. "In France," it noted, "one calls the *crime of lèse-nation* a conspiracy, a plot, or a criminal attempt against the laws and the constitution of the state."¹⁶³ Here "nation" was made exactly synonymous to the state and its laws. Interestingly, the illustrious *Encyclopédie*, that loudspeaker of the Enlightenment, in its treatment of *nation* followed Furetière's definition (of 1690) almost to the word, investing it with no particular significance and adding nothing new,¹⁶⁴ while the "historical and critical" *Dictionnaire universel des mœurs*, published in 1772, did not deem the concept important enough to be included in it at all.

The word *peuple* was ascribed two meanings by Furetière's dictionary—the general one, closely related to the concept of "nation": "the mass of persons who live in one country, who compose a nation"; and the particular meaning defined "by opposition to those who are noble, wealthy, and educated" (an implicit recognition of the three bases of elite status). The *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* affirmed this interpretation, paying more attention to the particular meaning and supporting it with a Latin translation, *plebs*, *vulgus*, and telling quotations from famous authors, such as: "There is a great difference between the *populus* in Latin, and *peuple* in French. The word *peuple* among us does not usually signify but what the Romans called *plebs*," taken from Vaugelas, and the already mentioned opposition of the *peuple* to the elites of birth and culture by La Bruyère. It also cited several proverbs to the same effect, whose message it diligently spelled out: "Tout le monde n'est pas *peuple*; c'est-à-dire, tout le monde n'est pas sot, ou duppe."¹⁶⁵

The article "Peuple" in the *Encyclopédie*, written in 1766, was a conscious attempt to vindicate the *people*. It began by stressing the respect for the *people* in classical antiquity and contemporary societies such as England and Sweden. "People," it stated, is "a collective name that is difficult to define since its meaning varies according to ideas, time, place, and the nature of government. The Greeks and the Romans, who knew much about men, greatly respected the people. In their midst the people made its voice heard . . . in all the affairs concerning the major interests of the country . . . in England the people chooses its own representatives to the House of Commons, and in Sweden peasants participate in the national assemblies." The author of the article (Jaucourt) obviously used the term "people" to refer to the rank and file of the population, rather than to the whole, thus staying close to the traditional pejorative meaning of the word. Moreover, following

Coyer (a treatise, "On the Nature of the People"), he observed that in France the application of the term was further narrowed to include only peasants and workers. But, while he accepted this definition, his essay did not share the contempt in which the people thus defined was held in France, but portrayed it as "sober, just, loyal and religious without caring about what it can gain from it . . . the largest and the most important part of the nation."¹⁶⁶

In the academic dictionary of 1777, one notes that the emphasis had changed rather dramatically; the general, previously neutral, meaning of the word became unmistakably positive, while the particular, derogatory sense, which had been stressed in earlier dictionaries, all but disappeared. Here, "people" denotes "a multitude of men from the same country, who live under the same laws. (The Hebrew people, The Jewish people, The people of Israel, The Roman people) . . . Sometimes the term refers to a multitude of men that adhere to the same religion, whether they live in the same country or not. Sometimes it also refers to the least considered part of the population of a city or a country . . . In this sense one says "mean people" or "low people" [*bas peuple*] . . . It is often said *The voice of the people is the voice of God*, that is to say that ordinarily the common sentiment is founded on truth."¹⁶⁷ The entry in the *New Dictionary* of 1793 was identical. Both the explicit definition and the examples offered made the "people" an eminently respectable entity. It was constituted by law more than by anything else and was the source of truth.

If the people was made worthy of respect, *patrie*, now closely identified with the state, became an object of passionate devotion in which the members of the people were expected to share. Furetière's dictionary methodically recorded various conventional meanings of the word, without investing any one of them with a particular significance. It had no special relevance; in 1690 patriotism was a sentiment characteristic of the ancients. Thus the entry *Patrie* read: "the country where one is born, and it refers to a particular place as much as to the province and the empire or the state where one was born . . . the Romans and the Greeks were famous for their love of the *patrie* . . . It is sometimes figuratively said that Rome is the *patrie* of all Christians. Heaven is our true *patrie*, a philosopher is everywhere in his *patrie*. *Patrie* is the place where one feels good." By the 1770s this equivocal and tepid attitude was decidedly abandoned. The academic dictionary of 1777 ruled confidently: *Patrie* is "the country, the State where one is born." The examples of common usage it provided left no doubt as to the proper sentiments one was to entertain toward it. "France is our *patrie*. Love of the *patrie*. For the good of the *patrie*. In the service of the *patrie*. To serve one's *patrie*. To defend one's *patrie*. To die for the *patrie*. The duty to the *patrie* is one of the primary duties." The dictionary mentioned that the word was sometimes applied to provinces and cities and that the heavens could be referred to as the "céleste patrie." The 1772 *Dictionnaire histo-*

rique et critique des moeurs, on the other hand, omitted all the meanings the word had had in French earlier and, under the heading *Patrie* (*amour de la*) treated only the Roman virtue, newly reappropriated and held as a model to the recently-indifferent-to-it Frenchmen. Among other things, the editor of the dictionary linked patriotism to the condition of freedom. "Why," he asked, "did the Greeks triumph over the Persians at Salamis?" and answered, "On the one side was heard the voice of an imperious master driving his slaves to battle, while on the other—the name of the *Patrie* that inspired free men."¹⁶⁸

It was this connection which was emphasized by the Chevalier de Jaucourt, who wrote the article "Patrie" for the *Encyclopédie*. A vulgar lexicographer, or a geographer not interested but in the location of one or another place, said the Chevalier, might define the *patrie* as a place of one's birth, but a philosopher would recognize that it expresses the significance we attach to the concepts of "*family, society, free state*, in which we are members, and of which the laws assure us our liberties and our happiness. There is no *patrie* under despotism."

Thus interpreted, the *patrie*, with its connotations of participation and liberty, appears to have acquired the meaning corresponding to that of the "free nation" in the English sense, although Jaucourt never made the connection; it seems to refer to the political system and community in which the nation, in the English sense, of the self-governing people, is able to exercise its nationality. The association of *patrie* and freedom could and did lead to universalistic, cosmopolitan attitudes. "The most perfect form of patriotism," wrote Jaucourt, "is to be so fully conscious of the rights of humanity, that one will want to see them respected for all the peoples on earth."¹⁶⁹ But at the same time, patriotism could be particularized. One sees this clearly in Rousseau's exaltation of national specificity: for this friend of humanity was as fervent a nationalist as any, without ever being a French patriot. Scores of lesser luminaries interpreted *amour de la patrie* as love of freedom in France, or even love for France without freedom. Furthermore, even when the primacy of liberty as such was emphasized, this notion of political community still took on meaning incompatible with the values implied in the English concept of "nation." In their devotion to the *patrie*, French patriots tended to forget about men. Rousseau excluded them from his definition altogether. "It is neither walls nor men that make a *patrie*," he explained; "it is the laws, the mores, the customs, the government, the constitution, and the way of life that ensues from all this."¹⁷⁰

A similar tendency—away from emphasis on the individual—was evident in the evolution of the concept of "state," to begin with much more emotionally charged in the French context. Furetière gives "Kingdom, country or an extent of land under the same authority" as the usual sense of *estat*; its other meanings, according to his dictionary, include "the manner of gov-

ernment in a particular nation," the different orders (estates) of the kingdom, "which were sometimes assembled to correct the disorders of the state, to cure the troubles of the state." These "estates" are the Church, the *Noblesse*, and the Third Estate, which Furetière defines as *bourgeois notables*. The word may also refer to assemblies of the Estates General and to "different degrees or conditions of persons distinguished by their functions, offices, professions, or occupations." (Here Furetière adds an interesting note. "One does everything," he says, "to sustain one's state, [that is] one's dignity, one's rank. In France one cannot recognize the state [position] of a person by his ways, or by his clothes. A comedian or a prostitute has the same dignity as seigneurs or marquises.") According to the dictionary of the Académie Française of 1694, the word *estat* applied first of all to the "condition of a person, thing, affair"; among other meanings are found (in this order) dignity or position, office, "government of a people which lives under the authority of a Prince, or in a Republic," "the country itself which is governed by the same authority," and finally, in France, "one calls *les estats* the three orders of the Kingdom, that are the clergy, the *noblesse*, and the People [*nota bene*], otherwise referred to as the Third Estate." The abridged edition of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* of 1762 also defines the "state" as "the empire, kingdom, province, or extent of territory under the same authority" and the manner of government "of a nation" (adding disrespectfully in this connection: "the reason of state is a mysterious reason, invented by politicians to authorize anything they might do without reason"), as well as government personnel and the three orders. (The Third Estate is defined as *bourgeois notables*.)¹⁷¹ Curiously, the *New Dictionary* of 1793 adds to these neutral and equivocal definitions very little. Its definitions of "state" as a polity, the territory or population under the same government, the manner of government, and government personnel are borrowed from the 1694 academic dictionary. In this treatment there is no evidence of the dramatic change in political discourse, or, for that matter, of the Revolution, which in 1793 was four years old. The article in the *Encyclopédie*, however, though written in 1756, reflects this transformation and demonstrates the collectivistic and abstract character of the new French loyalties.

The Chevalier de Jaucourt, the author of the article "L'Etat" in the *Encyclopédie*, begins by discussing the concept in the sense of "the state of nature" and "primitive state of man." Since man is a free being, he can modify this primitive state, creating thereby secondary states or *états accessoires*. "There is no secondary state more important," he rules, "than the civil state, or the state of civil society and government." Jaucourt proceeds to discuss the "state" in its political sense. He defines it in general terms as "a civil society, in which [or by which—*par laquelle*] a multitude of people are united under the authority of one sovereign, in order to enjoy, thanks to his protection and care, the security and happiness that are lacking in the state

of nature." Among the definitions likely to be known to his enlightened contemporaries, Jaucourt rejects that of Pufendorf, in which the state is confounded with the sovereign, and declares his preference for the one proposed by Cicero: "a multitude of people joined together by common interests and laws, to which they submitted by common accord."

From this Jaucourt jumps to the following momentous conclusion, saying: "We can consider the state as a moral person whose head is the sovereign, and whose limbs are the individual citizens: accordingly, we can attribute to this person certain specific actions and rights that are distinct from those of each citizen, and that no citizen nor group of citizens can arrogate to themselves . . . the state is a society animated by a single soul that directs all its movements in a consistent manner, with an orientation toward the common good. That is a happy state, a state *par excellence* . . . Thus it is from a union of wills supported by a superior power that the body politic, or the state, ensues; and without it a civil society is inconceivable."¹⁷² This is a concept of a polity as an autonomous collective being, possessed of an independent will, different from and superior to the wills of the individuals who compose it and who constitute but cells in the larger organism. Like "nation" in England, it is a polity reinterpreted and glorified, but it is not a nation as an elite composed of rational individuals. It is a rational individual itself, a reification of such a nation, an abstraction.

The Death of a King

At first it appeared that the community, which its champions named in the English manner a Nation, claimed only a portion in the sphere of the sacred and was content to share it with the king. Patriotism, as of old, was frequently confounded with devotion to the Crown. In 1767, Cardinal de Bernis as yet saw no contradiction between a faithful subject and a free and patriotic citizen. "The trust in the sovereign is the true mark of a patriot," he thought, "to obey and represent [the sovereign's will] with respect—here is the duty of a faithful subject and the way of a free and patriotic citizen." As late as 1787 Calonne still equated "*la voix du patriotisme*" with "*le sentiment dû au souverain*."¹⁷³ But the borderline between sharing with and the dispossession of the monarch was little by little obscured, and soon the king was expelled from the sphere of the sacred of which the Nation became the sole occupant.

The image of the sovereign Nation, partaking in authority alongside, rather than *in*, the king, which the now bold Parlements incessantly evoked in their remonstrances, presupposed rejection of the Divine Right theory. In vain did Louis XV fulminate against the arrogance of the *robins* during the dramatic *Séance de la flagellation* in March 1766, trying to reassert the principles of absolutism and insisting that "public order in its entirety emanates

from me, and that the rights and interests of the nation, which some would make a body separate from the monarch, are necessarily joined with mine, and rest only in my hands."¹⁷⁴ It was to no avail. The Divine Right of kings made no sense to anyone anymore, and eight years later, when Louis XV's grandson acceded to the throne, even the new king did not believe in it any longer.

In the general *cabiers* of the nobility and the Third Estate only a tiny minority asserted the Divine appointment of the king. Those *cabiers* which discussed the question of the ultimate source of authority at all tended to place it with the nation. The *cabier* of the Third Estate of Barcelonnette did call Louis XVI a God, but the epithet was used metaphorically, as a compliment rather than as an ontological statement, and was more than balanced by the praise of the Third Estate of Briey, who hailed him as "the most human of kings." The transfer of divinity from the king to the Nation was reflected in the use of the word "sacred" in the *cabiers*. A significant number of them concurred that "the person of the king is sacred," but an equally significant number also attributed this quality to the rights of the nation, of person and of property, as well as to the "security against arbitrary arrest," the "inviolability of the post," and the duty of justice that the king owed his subjects. The *noblesse* of Dourdan, which recognized the sanctity of the king, also demanded that a statement of the rights of the nation be "deposited in the treasury of the Church of Saint-Rémi in Rheims," the traditional place of coronation, with all the dignity of its God-sent and time-honored paraphernalia.¹⁷⁵

The king who had been God was demoted to the post of the first magistrate of the nation, the foundation stone of the social edifice, then the citizen-king, and finally was deprived of membership in the nation, and consequently of life, as a born traitor. This last degradation was not inevitable; it was brought on by the logic (or rather the lack thereof) of events. But it was made possible by the slow transformation of consciousness responsible for the change in the identity of France and the enthronement of the Nation as the origin of all values. The Nation replaced the king as the source of identity and focus of social solidarity, as previously the king had replaced God. By the time of the Revolution the transformation was complete. "National" became the attribute of everything that had before been "royal"; there were *national* guards and *national* army, *national* assembly and *national* education, *national* domains and *national* economy, *national* welfare and *national* debt. *Lèse-nation* replaced *lèse-majesté* as the crime of high treason.¹⁷⁶ Yet, in a way, the nation France remained faithful to the principle of medieval and absolute monarchy which proclaimed that "the King never dies." It was only a man who expired on the scaffold on a January morning of the year 1793. The king's authority was transferred to the Nation, and

with it came the attributes of the king's state—its unitary, abstract character, the indivisibility of sovereignty. The Nation became King.

Nation, the Supreme Being

In some ways the enthroned nation resembled God even more closely than its deified predecessor. In distinction from the king, who was after all a concrete being of flesh and blood, the French nation—like God—was an abstraction. It was a supreme rational being, worshipped, but on the whole left undefined, and thus appropriately inscrutable. In a monotheistic, even though Catholic, society such as France the coexistence of two supreme deities was unthinkable. The erection of the new cult demanded that the old one be destroyed. And it is not inconceivable that the iconoclastic tendencies of the French elite before the Revolution, and specifically its intense anticlericalism, had this imperative as their origin.

The concept of the "nation" was imported from England, but in the process was transformed. From a politically charged metaphor, a name for the association of free, rational individuals, it turned into a super-human collective person. In France, the "nation" inexorably tended toward abstraction and reification. To some extent this had to do with the sequence of the development of national consciousness there. If in England "nation" was a title given to a story, in France the title had existed long before the story was written. France (or at least its spokesmen) had wanted to be a nation long before it became one. The French elite adopted the idea of the nation not as an acknowledgment of the changes in social and political structure, which would necessitate or justify the application of the term to France (as this happened in England), but because such adoption might be instrumental in helping it out of its predicament. "We must have a nation for such a grand undertaking," exclaimed characteristically one enthusiast, "and the Nation will be born."¹⁷⁷ In other words, there was nothing in reality to constrain the imagination of the aspiring nationalists, no nation out there to impose its image on their consciousness; the concept was wholly negotiable, and it tended to remain abstract.

The nature of the needs that the idea of the nation was called upon to answer in the two countries determined the ideal relationship between the political community as a whole and the individuals of whom it was composed, and had important repercussions for the political culture it helped to create. In England, it was the dignity of the individuals who composed it that dignified the collective body (and justified calling it a "nation"). But in France it was the dignity of the whole that restored dignity to those who claimed membership in it. In England, it was the liberty of the individuals

who composed it that made the nation free. In France, it was the liberty of the nation that constituted freedom of the individuals. In England, the source of authority was the individual, a thinking human being; individuals delegated their authority to representatives, and thus empowered the nation. In France, it was the nation from which authority emanated, and it empowered individuals.

The Noble Nation and the Exclusion of Nobility

The first attempts to prove that the French nation was an empirical reality (an identifiable group of individuals that merited the title) were at the same time attempts of the nobility to monopolize nationality. According to the *thèse nobiliaire*, the nobility was the bearer of the sovereignty of the polity; it delegated authority to the king, who was subject to the fundamental laws or constitution of the kingdom, of which the nobility remained the guardian.¹⁷⁸ Absolutism was a usurpation of legitimate authority; it violated the rights (or liberties) of the nobility, and this violation implied infringement on the sovereignty of the polity, its enslavement. This identification of the liberty of the polity with the liberty of the nobility in it was rather commonplace at the time: since tyranny was defined as encroachment on the privileges (liberties) of those who traditionally enjoyed them, it followed logically that abstract liberty, its opposite, would be linked with respect to privilege. The nobility liked to see itself as the traditional, and therefore legitimate, governing part of the sovereign nation, and as the latter concept had the connotation of a community of citizens actively participating in government, rather than subjects devoid of will, it was easy to confuse and identify representatives with the entity that they represented. Montesquieu's compelling restatement of the *thèse nobiliaire* in the *Spirit of the Laws*, with its inclusive definition of the nobility that was acceptable to all of its many sectors, was a case of such identification, and the immense popularity of the *Spirit of the Laws* in its day was most probably related to this fact.

Montesquieu, who used the word "nation" throughout his work, both in the sense of a community of citizens and as a neutral term for polity, in several crucial passages made "nation" synonymous with the nobility. He defined it in this manner while discussing the "Origins and Revolutions of the Civil Laws among the French": "Under the two first dynasties, the nation, that is, the lords and the bishops, was often assembled; the common people were not yet thought of. [Sous les deux premières races on assembla souvent la nation, c'est à dire les seigneurs et les évêques; il n'était point des communes.]" Here the nation and the people were clearly distinguished. Occasionally, Montesquieu used the word "people," as well as "nation," as a neutral collective term, referring to the political community, but as a rule "people" was reserved for the lower classes.

An important feature of Montesquieu's notion of the nation, undoubtedly influenced by the fact that it was fashioned on the English experience, but also related to the confusion between the nation and the aristocracy, was its concreteness. It was not a reified concept, not the name of an abstract entity; rather, it referred to an identifiable association of individuals. "Their laws not being made for one individual more than another," wrote Montesquieu of the English perceptively, "each considers himself a monarch; and indeed the men of this nation are rather confederates than fellow-subjects [*concitoyens*]." ¹⁷⁹ There was no nation beyond the individuals who composed it, and its will was a product of their wills.

In the torrent of pamphlets produced in the year and a half before the Revolution, there may be discerned a similar attempt to reserve nationality to the owners of property (perhaps also manifested in the later restriction—by the law of December 22, 1789—of electoral rights to higher classes of tax-payers). But the identification of the nation with the Third Estate was of an entirely different significance.¹⁸⁰ The Third Estate, as we have seen, could be defined both as "bourgeois notables" and as the People. The first definition might have led to the equation of the nation with the Third Estate, but would exclude from the nation both the nobility and the people. In distinction, the definition of the Third Estate as the People, paradoxically, allowed noblemen to identify with it (explaining the anomaly of aristocrats—deputies of the Third), and it was in its quality of the People that the Third Estate was eulogized and hailed as the Nation by its "bourgeois" members and nobility alike. Rousseau identified the Third Estate with "public interest." Rabaut-Saint-Etienne (or *de Saint-Etienne*) explained: "Take away by supposition the two hundred thousand churchmen in France. The nation still remains. Take away even all the nobility by further supposition. The nation still remains . . . But if you take away the twenty-four million Frenchmen known by the name of 'Third Estate,' nobles and churchmen will remain but no nation."¹⁸¹

The People worshipped, however, was not the same as the people actually existing; it was some other—quite imaginary—twenty-four million Frenchmen. And since both the term "people" in its new, lofty meaning and "nation" referred to an abstraction, rather than an empirical reality, the glorification of the People did not necessarily imply a belief in the equal dignity of all those who composed it, the masses and the elite alike. The tacit acceptance of fundamental inequality between them was perpetuated in the distinction made between people and Nation, which persisted, perhaps owing to some kind of linguistic inertia, the lingering memory of the pejorative connotations of the word "people," as late as the inauguration of the National Assembly,¹⁸² and could be met with in the most unexpected contexts.

Who would expect to find contempt for the people, for example, in that harbinger of revolution, the *Social Contract*? And yet the liberty-loving

Jean-Jacques most certainly had no qualms in assigning the masses to the bottom of the social hierarchy, and no quarrel with hierarchy itself. "Thorough equality," he pronounced in the *Social Contract*, "would be out of place, as it was not found even in Sparta." By the social contract, citizens, to be sure, were all equal.¹⁸³ But, the oft-quoted definition to the contrary,¹⁸⁴ not every subject of a State was a citizen. In the *Government of Poland*, for instance, writing about "that one of the peoples of our day that [made him] feel closest to the men of old," whom Rousseau so much admired, he identified citizens with only the "active members of the republic, that is, those who are to take part in its government." The Polish Nation, the abstract Sovereign, it appears, was the Polish nobility: throughout most of the book Rousseau uses the two words as synonyms. "Take away the senate and the king," he says, "the knightly order, and thereby the state and the Sovereign as well, remain intact." The voice of the Polish nobility "is the voice of God on earth," for "the power to make laws belongs exclusively to the knightly order," and it is law, as we know, that is "the expression of general will," or "the will of the nation."¹⁸⁵

This usage is not entirely consistent, it is true, and in several places Rousseau is reminded of "the most numerous part of the nation," that is, first of all, the enserfed peasants, and the burghers of Poland. He believes that to arouse their patriotism, to tie them to the *patrie* and to its "form of government by bonds of affection," would be a good idea. For this reason, he even suggests that Polish nobles think about emancipating their peasants. But he is by no means an unequivocal advocate of this measure. He is afraid "of the vices and slavishness of the serfs themselves"; he cautions: "[Do] not free their bodies before you have freed their souls" (and unless compensation is provided to the owners "by means of exemptions, privileges, and other benefits in proportion to the number of their serfs found worthy of enfranchisement"). Freed people would do better service to the Nation, but masses will always be different from masters. The distinctions of rank should be preserved. Consider Rousseau's reasons in the following remarkable paean to the virtues of physical education, which anticipates the patriotic exhortations of "Turnvater" Jahn:

Because of firearms, bodily strength and skill now play a much lesser role in warfare than they used to, and so have fallen into discredit. But the result is that the man who possesses the advantage of good birth can now point to nothing within himself that sets him apart from other men and justifies his good fortune, no mark inseparable from his person that attests to his *natural right to superiority*—except for the qualities of mind and spirit, which are often open to dispute [and] turn up often in the wrong place . . . It is important . . . that those who are some day to exercise command over others should prove themselves, from early youth, superior to those others in every sense—or at least try to. More: it is a good thing for the people to be thrown with them frequently

on occasions set aside for pleasure, to learn to recognize them, to become accustomed to seeing them, and to share their amusements with them. *Provided only that distinctions of rank are maintained* and that the *people* never actually mingle with the *rulers* [emphasis everywhere added], this is the way to tie the former to the latter with bonds of affection, and to combine attachment to them with respect.

For Rousseau, thus, people remained "those others," who should be kept from mingling with the rulers who personified the nation. This attitude makes less surprising the explicit defense of slavery in the *Social Contract*, throughout which slave-holding societies of antiquity are presented as a shining model to modern nations, which Rousseau sees as degenerate: "Is liberty maintained only by the help of slavery? It may be so. Extremes meet . . . There are some unhappy circumstances . . . where the citizen can be perfectly free only when the slave is most a slave. Such was the case of Sparta. As for you, modern peoples, you have no slaves, but you are slaves yourselves; you pay for their liberty with your own. It is in vain that you boast of this preference; I find in it more cowardice than humanity."¹⁸⁶

As the idea of the nation penetrated into the consciousness of educated Frenchmen and began to claim their allegiance as the incarnation of the sacred, nationality was reclaimed from the nobility, and before long the nobility was deprived of membership in the nation altogether and defined as the anti-nation. This followed logically from the abstract quality of the French concept and the tendency to reification, which made the nation as a whole, rather than its constitutive parts, the source of authority. For this clearly implied that any authority not immediately delegated by the people was a usurpation, that historical justification of privilege was inadequate, and a hereditary right to representation in principle impossible. Logical conclusions are not necessarily the same as the conclusions drawn, but in this case the implications were made explicit. In the first place, there was an interest on the part of a particular group to do so. Those who did not yet get a foothold within the elite, though seeking a place in it and believing themselves worthy to occupy it, or those who had barely got such a foothold, could save themselves the trouble of fighting for social acceptance if they defined the *people*, that is, their generalized selves, as the only locus of authority and rejected the claims of the nobility to represent the nation (and therefore its claims to a superior status) as illegitimate.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps even more important was the fact that many of the well-situated members of the elite took the idea seriously, spelling out its conclusions out of pure idealism. It is therefore not that surprising to find among the most fervent supporters of the Third Estate the youthful Comte d'Antraigues, who extolled it (earning the admiration of its electors in Paris, who thought of nominating the patrician for their list) while castigating the hereditary nobility whence he came

as the scourge devouring the land of his birth. Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, a scion of a *parlementaire* (namely *robin*) family from Dauphiné, argued that the arrogation of the right of representation, and therefore privilege, by the nobility was a usurpation and "tyranny" equal in kind to the anti-national crimes of which he—and the nobility in general—accused absolute monarchy. Both he and d'Antraigues insisted that nobility, far from being the core of the nation, was an alien body, an impediment to the nation's freedom, a "sort of particular Nation within the Nation." The aristocracy endorsed and articulated an idea that doomed it. As was its habit in that century of frivolous enthusiasm, it "stepped out gaily on a carpet of flowers, little imagining the abyss beneath."¹⁸⁸

In their selfless attack on the second order, the new noble nationalists were helped by the arguments supplied by those of their fellow-members who attempted to defend and strengthen it, and by zealots of modest birth who wished to see it annihilated. Abbé Sieyès, like Boulainvilliers, represented the nobility as a separate race of men, indeed the Germanic Franks, but drew from this the opposite conclusion. In *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État?* he defined the nobility as a "people apart, a false people which, unable to exist by itself for lack of useful organs, latches on to a real nation like those vegetable growths which can only live on the sap of the plants they exhaust and suck dry," and asked, why does not the *real nation* "send all these families . . . back to the forests of Franconia?" Another son of the Gallic race, J. A. Delaure, in *The Critical History of the Nobility*, published in 1790, commiserated with his "unhappy people": "You have been trampled under the feet of barbarians whose ancestors massacred ours." The nobility, for him, were "all foreigners, the savages escaped from the forests of Germany."¹⁸⁹ They were not of the Nation, and there was no place for them within it.

The Philosophical Basis of the French Idea of the Nation: Rousseau's Social Contract

The Nation was a hollow, but charged, concept. The image of its referent in the minds of its worshippers remained foggy, but it was obviously one and indivisible, the ultimate source of authority, with a claim on the unconditional and total loyalty of its members. (This loyalty was identified with patriotic virtue and made one eligible for nationality.)

"The Nation exists before everything, it is the source of everything," preached Sieyès in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État?* "All sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation. No body, no individual can exercise authority which does not explicitly emanate from it," read Article 3 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.¹⁹⁰ This revolutionary rhetoric drew on the ideas developed during several preceding decades; its idiom, specifically, was that

of the *Social Contract*. This work remains the quintessential expression of the French nationalist vision on the eve of the Revolution, although Rousseau was not a French patriot and although the concept "nation" was never used there in its evocative sense, and it was not until later, in his advice to the Poles, that Rousseau translated the original terms "Sovereign" and "general will" into the language of "nation" and "the will of the nation."

The subject of the *Social Contract* is society as such. The contract is concluded by men when the preservation of the state of nature is no longer feasible, and society, or civil state, is its product. The clauses of the social contract, says Rousseau, "may be reduced to one—the total alienation of each associate with all his rights, to the whole community . . . alienation without reserve." As the personalities of the contracting parties dissolve, "at once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly contains voters, and receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life, and its will. This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons, formerly took the name of city, and now takes that of Republic or body politic; it is called by its members State when passive, Sovereign when active, and Power when compared with others like itself. Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of people, and severally are called citizens, as sharing in sovereign power, and subjects, as being under the laws of the State." "Each of us," says Rousseau, "puts his person and his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will." The exercise of the general will, he defines, is Sovereignty.

The passage from the state of nature to the civil state is the source—and meaning—of morality. Society (body politic, Republic, State, Sovereign, or People) is law unto itself. All authority, all values emanate from it. It is, by definition, infallible. "The Sovereign, merely by virtue of what it is, is always what it should be," says Rousseau. "The general will is always right." A piquant corollary of this is Rousseau's acceptance of the "reason of state" argumentation: "There neither is nor can be any kind of fundamental law binding on the body of the people—not even the social contract itself." As Rousseau moves toward an essentially conservative and authoritarian position similar to that of the seventeenth-century advocates of the "reason of state" doctrine, he, like the latter, concludes that obedience is the proper characteristic of the citizen in his relationship with the Sovereign. Anything else is simply ruled out. "The Sovereign," says Rousseau, "being formed wholly of the individuals who compose it, neither has nor can have any interest contrary to theirs; and consequently the sovereign power need give no guarantee to its subjects, because it is impossible for the body to hurt all its members." And, as behooves a great mind, contemptuous of evidence (such as divers precursors of the guillotine), he insists that "it cannot hurt any [of its members] in particular" either. As to the individual members who

fail to appreciate the state of bliss in which they exist, Rousseau's verdict is unequivocal: "Whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing else than that he will be forced to be free."

The implications of this already alarming statement are even more disconcerting, since the general will, as we learn, is not necessarily unanimous, and while the "people is never corrupted . . . it is often deceived" as to what is good for it. "There is often a great deal of difference," cautions Rousseau, "between the will of all and the general will." While general will is the expression of common interest, the will of all is just a sum of particular interests. To ensure the expression of the former, rather than the latter, Rousseau advocates nothing less than a totalitarian state with no intermediate bodies between the central power and the mass of atomized individuals: "It is . . . essential . . . that there be no partial societies within the State, and that each citizen think only his own thoughts." It is not difficult to recognize in the obsession of the revolutionary era with *unity*, in the incessant calls for the erosion of distinctions between classes and provinces, precisely this concern of Rousseau.

Sovereignty—the authority of the collective being which is the State—is inalienable and indivisible, "for the will either is or is not general." For this reason, it cannot be proposed or even represented by any body which is smaller than the whole. Rousseau explicitly rejects the idea of representation as the invention of feudalism, "that iniquitous and absurd system which degrades humanity and dishonors the name of man." Yet, if no amount of particular wills constitute the general will, how is it to be known? To this Rousseau gives an answer which would satisfy the aristocracy, for it lets it in, appropriately defeudalized, through the back, yet capacious, door. First, he says, "the general will is always in the right, but the judgment which guides it is not always enlightened. It must be made to see objects as they are, and sometimes as they ought to appear to it . . . The individuals see the good they reject; the public wills the good it does not see. All stand equally in need of guidance. The former must be compelled to bring their wills into conformity with their reason: the latter must be taught to know what it wills . . . This makes the legislator necessary." The legislator, whose mission—legislation—"is at the highest possible point of perfection," is a special person, endowed with a "great soul" and reason "above the range of the common herd." He has the capacity to reveal to the multitude the general will ("law being purely the declaration of the general will") and in doing so is justified even in duping the people and presenting it in a religious idiom as divine revelation ("in order to sustain by divine authority those whom human prudence cannot move"). In the service of so great a cause anything is permissible, for, after all, "there are a thousand kinds of ideas which it is

impossible to translate into popular language," and yet the dumb masses must be moved.

Second, while representation in legislation is unthinkable, the people may and should be represented in government. Government is "an intermediate body set up between the subjects and the Sovereign, to secure their mutual correspondence, charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of liberty, both civil and political." The government, like society or State, is also "a moral person endowed with certain qualities"; it is "on a small scale what the body politic which includes it is on a great one." The type of government most perfectly corresponding to the essence of society would be democracy, but perfection, unfortunately, is not the share of mortal men. "Where there is a people of gods," decrees Rousseau, "their government would be democratic. So perfect a government is not for men." The best *possible* government, he declares, is aristocracy. There are "three sorts of aristocracy—natural, elective, and hereditary. The first is only for simple peoples; the third is the worst of all governments; the second is the best, and it is aristocracy properly so called." The merits of aristocratic government are the following: "By this means uprightness, understanding, experience, and all other claims to preeminence and public esteem become so many further guarantees of wise government. Moreover, assemblies are more easily held, affairs better discussed and carried out with more order and diligence, and the credit of the State is better sustained abroad by venerable senators than by a multitude that is unknown and despised. In a word, it is the best and most natural arrangement that the wisest should govern the many."¹⁹¹ So much for equality.

Rousseau's concept of society closely corresponded to the concept of the Divine Right "state" elaborated under Richelieu; it was its abstract and generalized descendant. The principles of the *Social Contract* were embraced by the pioneers of French nationalism lock, stock, and barrel; Rousseau himself, as was noted above, gave his theory a *national* flavor in the *Government of Poland*. By way of estrangement of a native idea and its return under a new name, the concept "nation" was brought and placed solidly within the fold of the French political tradition; and while the state was nationalized, the nation that emerged was destined to be profoundly etatist. Through the idea of the indivisible and sovereign general will—or the will of the nation—it was conceptualized as an autonomous entity, existing above and independently of the wills of its individual members and dominating their wills. This, in turn, changed the meaning of citizenship, which could no longer be understood as active participation in the formulation of the collective policy that presumably expressed the general will, but became limited to the willingness to carry it out. Good, that is, patriotic, citizens were those who served their Nation zealously, even if the only zeal its will

allowed was that of servility. Above all, patriotism implied complete renunciation of self, the effacement of the private in front of the public. Civil liberty lost much of its meaning, while political liberty, which was emphasized, came to designate the unobstructed realization of the general will. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau defined "civil liberty" by opposition to "natural liberty," which was closely related to "an unlimited right to everything [an individual] tries to get and succeeds in getting." The central characteristic of "civil liberty," by contrast, was that it was "limited by the general will." This limitation, however, only increased its value, making liberty "moral," which was liberty proper. "We might, over and above all this, add, to what man acquires in the civil state, moral liberty, which alone makes him truly master of himself; for the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty."¹⁹² The will of the nation was to preserve itself. In the *Social Contract*, this self-preservation presupposed autonomy. But in the *Government of Poland*, liberty was more specifically associated with particularism, while the lack of *national* character fostered servitude.¹⁹³ The will of the Nation was to speak through an elite of virtue—the legislator and the elective aristocracy, whom Rousseau sometimes confused with the Nation itself—thus modifying the meaning of the concept of equality as well.

The concept of the elite of virtue, as well as that of intelligence—the select few to whom the objective laws of the natural and right social order were "evident"—were contributed to the French national tradition by Physiocrats and Neo-Physiocrats, the group that Tocqueville singled out as the quintessential example of the revolutionary ideology. Both notions appeared in Condorcet, in an essay written in 1788, "Sur la constitution et les fonctions des assemblées provinciales." Condorcet's verdict was unequivocal: the people could not be entrusted with managing its own affairs. "It's not in the least for the benefit of the superior classes, it's for the benefit of the people itself that one should not give positions of critical importance to those whom we call the bourgeoisie or the Third Estate, because the interests of the people are never defended with more nobility, moderation, and the least danger to the public tranquility, than when they are confided to men of a superior class. History offers innumerable proofs of this . . . In one word, it is for the good of all . . . to compose assemblies only of men whom education and personal consideration provide with the best means to do good."¹⁹⁴ In a nation conceived in this manner, equal right of opinion and participation made no sense. There was a fundamental inequality between the elite to which the will of the nation was revealed and the non-elite from which—owing to either insufficient virtue or ignorance—it was concealed. Equality thus acquired the meaning of uniformity of the populace, which was a condition for the unity of the nation, facilitated the expression of the general will, and therefore ensured its freedom. The apparently contradic-

tory insistence of the intellectuals on natural equality and individual liberty, and characteristic pronouncements such as Turgot's "there is no greater enemy of liberty than the people," were not at all inconsistent, but formed a coherent authoritarian outlook.

Competition with England and *Ressentiment*

The idea of the nation took root in France around 1750.¹⁹⁵ It became an integral, if not the central, part of the elite discourse and effected a profound change in mentality. Shortly thereafter it changed its original meaning. Two successive developments were chiefly responsible for this change. One was the reclamation of nationality from the nobility (itself, perhaps, a sign of the elite's impatience with the status quo and the unconscious substitution of the change in the cognitive *model* of reality for the much-more-difficult-to-achieve change of reality) and the redefinition of the nation, which made it much more inclusive, but eventually excluded the hereditary aristocracy and discredited the aristocratic position. The second development followed upon the success of the first. As the elite converted to national identity, the preoccupation with status and power struggle within the country was partially—and during the Revolution completely—eclipsed by the concern for international precedence.

The etatism of the French nationality was not a foregone conclusion. The idea of the nation, as imported from England, implied commitment to the values of individual liberty and equality. Within French political thought itself, etatism espoused and articulated by the agents of absolutism coexisted with the aristocratic (parliamentarian as well as "feudal") tradition of opposition to absolutism, which contained important libertarian elements. The abandonment of the noble order by its members and the attack on it by the actual or potential members of the elite who were not noble were partially responsible for the preference of the etatist over the libertarian current in the incipient French national consciousness. The factor which strongly reinforced this tendency and ensured the ascendancy of the etatist position was the competition with and changed attitude toward England.

After the death of Louis XIV it became clear that France had lost its preponderance in Europe. This was partly due to the policies of the late king, who had left the country in a sorry state, but was also highlighted by England's spectacular rise to centrality. France ceded to England the position of leadership it had held in the seventeenth century. As the elite came to identify with the political community as a whole, with France the nation, its members were increasingly bothered by this changed relationship. French national patriotism was expressed in the burning desire to restore to the nation the superior status it had lost to England and, with a typically French em-

phasis, win back its *glory*. This was the new meaning assumed by the concept of the "regeneration" of France, which nationalistic and patriotic Frenchmen professed to be their goal.¹⁹⁶

There were two ways to ensure the preeminence and glory of France: one was to introduce liberal reforms and make France a nation similar to the English; the other was to degrade this rival power. The first approach, espoused by, among others, some of the older *philosophes*, most notably Montesquieu and Voltaire, and discussed earlier, was based on a firm confidence in the ability of France to implement what it had learned from England and, having done so, easily surpass its model and competitor. This confidence was at the basis of the mid-century popularity of England among the educated French. Comfortable in their self-esteem, they held no grudge against it, for they were sure that soon there would be no grudge to hold. "We are in many things the disciples of England," wrote the staunchest Anglophile of all, Voltaire; "we shall end by being equals of our masters."¹⁹⁷ The task proved to be more difficult and promised to take much longer than was expected. For that reason Anglophilia gradually gave way to Anglophobia.

The French aristocratic and intellectual elite in the second half of the eighteenth century found itself in a position which was—from a sociological point of view—a perfect breeding ground for *ressentiment*. Drawn into competition with England by adopting the English national idea as its model and by the desire to regain its glory, France lacked the social conditions necessary for the implementation of this model, thereby making equality with (even less superiority over) England impossible. It was perceived as essentially comparable, equal to England, and at the same time was clearly inferior to it. And the aristocratic-intellectual elite in France—whose members now identified their status with that of France as a whole—was in the position to be personally wounded by the superiority of England and to feel *ressentiment* generated by the relative position of the country.

The early French nationalist thought, indeed, displays unmistakable characteristics of a philosophy of *ressentiment*. Significantly, these characteristics are more salient in the professedly liberal thought of the period than in the conservative thought which simply rejected the English values and refused to admit that France was in any way comparable to its successful neighbor.¹⁹⁸ The liberals resentful of England, in distinction, at least in name shared the English values. France conceived of itself as a liberal nation. The rejection of the English model was expressed in the transvaluation of its values, but also in their emphatic appropriation. In the hands of the luminaries who forged the French national consciousness, the concepts of nation, liberty, and equality acquired an entirely different meaning, sometimes diametrically opposed to the one they had in England, but remained tied to each other and were idolized. They were affirmed in the "solemn" and ex-

plicit Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, such as was never thought of in England, and this Declaration, with its proud slogan, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," became the symbol of France, replacing the Marian *fleur de lys*. The Nation France was committed to and worshipped its Holy Trinity as much as formerly France the community of the faithful worshipped another. But, as often as not, the idea of the nation was replaced by the ideal of national unity, which was called "fraternity"; equality exchanged for uniformity; and "liberty" for sovereignty or freedom of the general will from constraint by either another sovereign (whether presumed, such as the king, or real, such as another nation) or any of its members. Collectivity overshadowed the individual, and his rights, which never before had been articulated with such circumstance, were pushed into the background.¹⁹⁹

Opinions that were both expressly liberal and Anglophobe became increasingly prevalent in the latter part of the century, counting among their advocates Rousseau, Mably, Diderot, d'Holbach, and Marat, and were especially influential in the 1780s. For this group of ideologues, England was no longer the land of freedom, and they found little to admire in its constitution. Mably explicitly disputed Montesquieu's authority in this matter, writing that English liberty was but tentative, a half-liberty at best. "Many writers, and the author of *The Spirit of Laws*, whose authority is so great, have lavished praises on this constitution; but can one examine it carefully and fail to see that liberty is only sketched there? . . . they enjoy only a half-liberty." England was justified in loving it, but it was wrong to regard it as "le modèle et le chef-d'oeuvre de la politique."²⁰⁰ Rousseau was adamant that it should not be so regarded. The example of England should not be followed, he counseled his Polish audience; it should be "a lesson to the Poles" how not to behave: "Your constitution is superior to Great Britain." England "lost its freedom," he admonished. "I can only record my astonishment at the irresponsibility and lack of caution, the stupidity even, of the English: having lodged supreme power in the hands of their deputies, they place no limitation on the use these deputies will be able to make of their power through the seven long years of their mandate." This served England right, for, as Rousseau noted in the *Social Contract*, "the use it makes of the short moments of liberty it enjoys shows indeed that it deserves to lose them."²⁰¹

The greatest obstacle for freedom in England was corruption, that "shocking evil . . . which transforms the organ of liberty into that of servitude."²⁰² England sold its liberty for thirty pieces of silver, bartered it away for luxury and monetary profits. Commercial interests ousted its sacred flame from the English hearts, and nothing but greed reigned therein. The verdict was clear. The aristocratic contempt for the *nouveaux riches*, which among the more methodical intellectuals turned into a consuming hatred of

money as such, fused with resentment toward England. Though the judges might not use the phrase, England, that country which had only "des affections métalliques," in their view, was a *capitalist* society. It was irredeemable. Mably wrote: "Moved by the desire to augment their riches and extend their empire, [the English] consult nothing but their avarice and ambition . . . England, mistress of the seas, has nothing to fear from strangers. It is her own great power, her over-vast colonies, and her over-extended commerce that she has to beware of. Perhaps she needs to experience disgrace in order to conserve the greatest of her assets, that is, her liberty; but who can assure that it will know how to profit from a disgrace that will offend her avarice and her ambition?"²⁰³ A capitalist society, a nation that was unjust, avaricious, venal, corrupt, and dominated by commercial interests was no fit model for France.

The resentment toward England that shaped the ideological foundations of the French national consciousness at this highest level of intellectual sophistication was present and contributed to its formation on more popular levels as well. The Seven Years' War of 1756–1763, we learn from the chroniclers of French nationalism, "aroused considerable national feeling."²⁰⁴ In the popular literature of the time England was styled "les sauvages de l'Europe," "that abominable country, where reason, humanity and nature cannot make their voices heard."²⁰⁵ This resentment was best reflected in the immensely popular *Le Siège de Calais*, a presentation of the traditional hostility between France and England in the form of a tragedy, which extolled the virtues of the former and stressed the vices of the latter. The author, Pierre de Belloy, was moved to write it by the urge to "instill in the nation a self-esteem and self-respect which alone can make it again what it was formerly,"²⁰⁶ that is, by the desire to see France "regenerated," but also by the perceived necessity to fight Anglophilia, which apparently still poisoned the mind of the theater-going public. Imitation of the English, including "their supposed independence," he insisted, could not even earn Frenchmen their esteem. Nevertheless, de Belloy admitted that something could be learned from perfidious Albion: patriotism. England was hated, but not ignored, and its enemies respected it in spite of themselves.

French Involvement in the War of American Independence and Its Effects on the Character of French Nationalism

This resentment was also reflected in the enthusiastic support of the educated public for the American War of Independence, the French involvement in which—both military and emotional—had a profound effect on the subsequent development and character of French nationalism. The war was one of the important sources of inspiration for the Revolution,²⁰⁷ and the passionate interest of the French elite in the conflict which, objectively speaking,

had nothing to do with it may throw some light on the motives which led to the Revolution as well.

"The enthusiasm which the French people exhibited in the matter of the American War of Independence," wrote Aulard in the *Political History of the French Revolution*, "was born in part of their hatred of England, but also of their hatred of despotism in general." This diagnosis by the historian of French patriotism, revealing as it is, still seems to underestimate the share of Anglophobia in the French pro-American sentiments. The assessment of Abbé Morellet, when he wrote, in a letter of January 5, 1777, to Lord Shelburne, that enmity toward England was by far a stronger motive among the Parisian supporters of America than their love of American liberty, is, probably, more accurate.²⁰⁸ In fact this moving sentiment was made quite explicit. For volunteers, such as Lafayette and Ségur, the chance to contribute to the humiliation of England was admittedly the paramount motivation.²⁰⁹ These young men, on their own testimony, "burned with a desire to repair the affronts of the last wars, to fight the English and [in the last place] to fly to help the American cause." Lafayette was "persuaded that to harm England is to serve (dare I say revenge) my country" and advised involvement on the side of the colonists because of that. Upon his return from America he listed the primary reasons for "the part [he] took in the American cause" as "my love for my country, my desire to witness the humiliation of her enemies." The far more consequential motives of the War Minister, Vergennes, were apparently the same, except that he did not pay even lip service to Liberty, to which aristocratic volunteers declared themselves passionately attached.²¹⁰

It was the relationship between England and France, rather than between England and America, that preoccupied the only seemingly altruistic supporters of the latter. It appeared clear that the secession of the colonies would weaken the "haughty islanders" and that this would be to the benefit of France. The *Journal de Genève*, a voice of the Establishment, asserted in 1778: "England in her days of splendour did not believe that her invasions and conquests must be limited; an immense trade contributed both to her natural pride and to the audacity born of her riches . . . finally worn out by her conquests, by her victories if you will, England thought to find in her colonies indemnities and inexhaustible resources, a blind obedience that no vexation or the yoke of the heaviest despotism could alter. We have seen the falsity, the illusion, of this system: her tyranny abhorred, attacked, destroyed!" And at this very moment, as if it were some kind of see-saw, France "resumes her empire, her former preponderance, or at least returns to the place she should never have forfeited among the first powers of Europe." On the fringes, Brissot, in *Testament politique de l'Angleterre*, expressed confidence that France, "having embraced the cause of the persecuted colonists, would fall heir to the grandeur of her rival, who was in the

last agonies." Significantly, it was not liberalism, but the nationalistic enmity toward England, to which appealed the propagandist journal *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique*, edited by, among others, Benjamin Franklin. It consciously played up Frenchmen's wishful thoughts of humiliating England and thus regaining the place which was properly their own. The support of America, insisted the journal in 1777, offered France the most favorable opportunity "ever given to any nation to increase its own wealth and power while humiliating and weakening the most formidable, the most insolent, and the most inveterate enemy."²¹¹

The American War of Independence eventually facilitated the identification of radicalism with nationalism in France and strengthened the appeal of the collectivistic (etatist)—and undemocratic—reinterpretation of the values of liberty, equality, and nation. The American War dissociated liberty, and with it equality, patriotism, and nation, from the English example. It seemed possible now to maintain these ideals without following England, and yet without giving up hope of triumphing over her on her own ground. This factual dissociation between the central values of the new canon and England added legitimacy to the theory of the general will in which such dissociation was already implied. The most explicitly anti-English works of its advocates, such as Rousseau's *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, appeared in print in the 1780s;²¹² the connection between their brand of liberalism and the self-assertion of France against England seemed obvious, and they were immensely popular. The cause of this liberalism was identified with the French national cause; and, as a result, this position was established as the dominant current within the French liberal tradition.

In addition, as Tocqueville pointed out nearly 150 years ago, the American War strengthened the rationalist tendency in French thought and modified this new tradition in a way which further removed it from its English source.²¹³ From the defensibility of disregarding the example of England, French thinkers derived the justification for disregarding history. American independence seemed to them to be the result of the right philosophy arrived at through a purely intellectual effort. Reason, in French thought, was not the ability of an individual, any individual in his right mind, to consider and choose between different alternative ways to achieve the desired goals and between the goals to desire. From rather early on it had the meaning of the true philosophy. This view was consistent with and supported the theory of the general will and the belief in the existence of an elite, whether of virtue or intelligence, able to interpret it. Now, because of the American Revolution, this reason as the true philosophy, evident to a chosen few (and therefore the chosen few—the elite), became all-powerful. France could be changed, it could be made great again, it could surpass England and become free, if only it followed the advice of reason.

International competition altered the significance of the struggle for lib-

erty. For the pre-revolutionary elite, as well as for the political leaders of the Revolution, at least one important reason for aspiring to it was the existence of England. Having gained liberty, which—given that France possessed the right philosophy—was an easy task, France would regain its position of leadership, which would instantly become clear to everyone, including its rival across the Channel. France would be the first to establish *real* liberty in Europe. Thus prophesied George Washington in a French play in 1791, while admonishing an Englishman:

Peut-être le Français, objet de votre haine,
Sera-t-il le premier qui brisera sa chaîne.

Camille Desmoulins, too, in *La France libre*, expressed similar confidence: "How the face of this empire has changed! how we have advanced with a giant step toward liberty! . . . at present . . . the foreigners are going to regret that they are not French. We shall surpass these English, so proud of their constitution, who ridiculed our servitude."²¹⁴

Liberty was to humiliate England and restore France to its rightful place. The elite transferred its vexation with the internal imperfections of French society, so far as it was concerned, to the threat to the country's external standing. Its efforts were redirected. The fight with absolutism became just a means to a far more glorious end. The sting of aristocratic reaction was displaced, and the anger that drove it became nationalism.

The surprising quality of French nationalism during revolutionary wars (which persisted for a long time after) was not so much the increased militancy of an embattled and threatened nation, as the violent and irrational Anglophobia which possessed it. Statesmen represented England as "les éternels ennemis de notre nation."²¹⁵ Poets believed no epithet sinister or grotesque enough to depict it. To Rouget de Lisle, England was "l'affreux brigand de la Tamise," the origin of all of France's afflictions ("de la France il fit tous les maux"), "artisan des malheurs du monde." Lebrun called it "the odious Insular," "perfidious" and "drunk with fortune," "the greedy depredator of land and seas," and the destroyer of peace on earth. The mission of France was to rid the world of this monster. This was easier said than done, however, and patriotic frustration was poured into wishful and irate verse:

Au livre des destins la vengeance est écrite;
Albion expiera les maux de l'univers.
Avant que la Tamise ait compté quelques lustres,
Elle aura vu changer ses triomphes illustres
En sinistres revers.
Vainement l'insolente à sa noble rivale
Croit opposer des flots l'orageux intervalle;

La perfide s'épuise en efforts superflus.
Tremble, nouvelle Tyr! Un nouvel Alexandre
Sur l'onde où tu régnaï va disperser ta cendre:
Ton nom même n'est plus.²¹⁶

Given the moderation of England in relation to revolutionary France in comparison with other parties to the conflict, especially Prussia, such rage could be explained by the hostilities but to a minor extent. It reflected deeper motives, springing from the very core of the new French identity and consciousness.

A Note on Non-Elite Nationalism

While the elite agonized, French people learned to read. The elite generalized its agony, transforming it into noble indignation with "tyrannies" of all sorts, and fiery patriotic idealism, and as it spared no effort in publicizing the results of these intellectual exercises, it gave the masses food for thought and forged the weapons with which they were to be armed. While the elite was drawn to nationalism, moved by interests peculiar to itself, the rest of at least the literate and semi-literate population in France, the groups that constituted the "bourgeoisie" or the middle class,²¹⁷ the denizens of the cities, were also growing more patriotic, realizing that their personal destinies depended on the existence of the nation and earnestly striving to help it on the way to happiness and greatness. But the idea of the nation appealed to the bourgeoisie for very different reasons.

If the nationalism of the elite originated in the belief that things had changed for the worse and the desire to arrest this development, to prop and refund their threatened, but still superior, status, that of the bourgeoisie was aroused by the un hoped-for possibility of improving their lot and acquiring a better status. In a nation, the bourgeoisie could be much more than it was allowed to be in the king's state and the society of orders. A new prospect of dignity opened before it. With the development of the ideology of nationality, the French middle classes found themselves in a potentially advantageous situation which made their members wish to take full advantage of it. They welcomed nationalization of identity. They were receptive to ideas of active membership in the political community, the guaranteed ability to exert influence on public policy which affected their lives, respect for themselves as individuals, liberty and equality in the English sense of these words. A nation defined as a unity of free and equal members both rendered legitimate these heretofore unthinkable bourgeois aspirations and made their realization possible.

The bourgeoisie eagerly joined the elite in demands for "uniformity of

taxation, equality in its assessment, political liberty, individual liberty."²¹⁸ The English model, the system of values imported from England, appealed to them and they subscribed to it willingly. In distinction from the aristocratic and intellectual elite, however, the interests of the bourgeoisie did not lead it to identify with France as a whole; the middle classes concentrated on conditions within France. As a result, the change of the relative standing of France vis-à-vis other powers (or the other power) was at best of secondary importance for the middle-class nationalism, and it was much less fueled by wounded pride and a desire to get even. This nationalism, as expressed in pre-revolutionary pamphlets and especially in the *cahiers de doléances*, from which the anti-English (and anti-foreign in general) sentiment was conspicuously absent,²¹⁹ was much closer to the English nationalism than to the nationalism of the French aristocratic and intellectual elite. Since, unlike the latter, bourgeois who remained bourgeois rarely articulated their views, we know much less about what they really thought, but it is still possible to venture some conjectures. What they read in the definitions provided by various primers in nationalism²²⁰ was probably different from what was stressed by the elite ideologues. The nation they envisioned and wanted to become was unlikely to be the one emerging in the writings of Rousseau, Mably, and their followers. But they were prone to welcome the identification of the nation with the Third Estate, that is, the people alone, against those who still stuck to their privileges and were reluctant to recognize universal equality. (And yet many would be reluctant to carry this definition to its logical conclusion and would rather restrict the "natural rights" of participation and active membership in a nation to the propertied classes.)

The writers of the bourgeois *cahiers* would agree that not another nation, but the despotism in France, the class and provincial divisions and privileges, were responsible for its misfortunes, and that not the humiliation of England, but the victory over and abolition of France's own deficiencies would bring the nation happiness. This middle-class nationalism was inward-oriented and fundamentally constructive. The national cause and the cause of liberal individualistic reform were interdependent and seemed identical. Only the elevation of everyone to the lofty position of members of a nation, sharing in the same interests, brothers and equals, would ensure the liberty and dignity of every individual Frenchman. And liberty and equality would contribute to the development among Frenchmen of patriotism, "the secret resource which maintains order in the state, the virtue which is most necessary for its preservation, its internal well-being, and its external force and glory." The surest way to light this sacred fire in the hearts of citizens was "to cater to their interests by rewards" and specifically to offer them equality of opportunity.²²¹ The glory of France, according to this line of argument, depended on the well-being of its members, not the other way around.

The ideals upheld by elite nationalists, which in their arcane writings tended to assume a different meaning, easily lent themselves to this simple interpretation. Individual liberty could be regarded as "moral liberty found in obedience to general will" and equality as equality of citizens from which the masses of the people were excluded, but to find these notions convincing, one needed to be either very sophisticated (and able to understand them) or stupid (and thus susceptible to indoctrination), and the French bourgeoisie was neither. It consisted of a middling sort of people, smart enough to recognize a good opportunity. The elite forged and armed the middle classes with weapons it had not much use for itself. As the Revolution wrought havoc in the old social structure, and its elite succumbed to the guillotine or self-effaced to escape it, a new elite was recruited from the newly empowered middle classes and blended with the remnants of the old. Its notions were added to the national arsenal of ideas and assumed a prominent, though rarely dominant, place in it—to be used when the chance arose.

Tocqueville noted what he thought was the inconstancy of the love for liberty among his countrymen and was grieved by it. One could observe in France, he wrote, "the desire for freedom reviving, succumbing, then returning, only to die out once more and presently blaze up again," compelling Frenchmen now and again to try and "graft the head of liberty onto a servile body."²²² But one could argue that the love of liberty in France was a constant. It was a national trait, an element of the French national identity, only "liberty" meant different things to different Frenchmen, and frequently referred to its very opposite. The French national identity was of a mixed heritage; it was ambivalent. It was woven from threads which came from disparate sources and brought together independent—and sometimes contradictory—traditions and interests. The chief factor in the emergence of this encompassing ideology, which was to become the basis of the social and political solidarity in France and of the identity of every individual Frenchman, was the situation of the French nobility and later a modified part of it, the aristocratic *cum* intellectual elite—whose members were the main propagators of nationalism—in the course of the eighteenth century. The chief reason for the adoption of the idea of the nation in France was the fact that this French elite in the eighteenth century was in a state of crisis, and the idea of national patriotism offered a means of resolving it. French nationalism was born out of the grievances and frustrations of the most privileged groups of the society, the final form and channel of the aristocratic reaction. It was a result of appropriation by irritated lords of the idea of the state developed and disseminated by agents of the Crown, and its expansion and reinterpretation in such a manner that it could be turned against the latter. This idea elevated the selfish interests of the aristocracy, and turned their

fight to protect their privileges into a moral crusade. It turned reactionaries into revolutionaries, transformed them, indeed, into ardent idealists, without making them reactionaries any less, or for that matter liberals—in the original sense of the word—any more.

Then as now liberal democracy was not the only alternative to despotism, and for a society wishing to exchange its "old regime" for a new one, it was a highly unlikely option. Despotism has many forms. The little man could be respected only in the name of the little man, but trampled upon, overtaxed, starved, guillotined, and otherwise mutilated in the name of thousands of lofty ideals; and when it came to this, the king's glory was as good as the glory of the state or the nation; the God of Christians as demanding and indifferent as the Supreme Being or abstract humanity. But then, the idea of the nation—the symbolic elevation of the people to the position of an elite—was imported from England, and there liberty meant liberty of the individual, and equality meant equality and not inequality. And there were a significant number of people in France to whom the arguments of ideologues made no sense, but these ideas appealed very much, and who in their sage innocence saw nothing but these ideas in the arguments of ideologues. They were pronouncing the same words, but proclaiming different principles. Yet the flame of French national patriotism burned in the breasts of them all.

And on top of this confusion there was the baggage of previous existences. France, the wandering soul, had moved from one domicile to another: from the temple of God, to the body of the king and his state, and then to that of the nation, and from each home she left, she took with her possessions that made her unique, some furnishings such as her elegant tongue, her brilliant culture, and her refined manners, her inextinguishable sense of election and love of glory.

Or perhaps she was a body, a chamber into which three souls came to dwell in succession, and as each one came, it found the arrangements left by the previous resident, which it made its own and rearranged, but not too much, and then left to the one that came to succeed it.

France the nation bore an unmistakable resemblance to France the king's state and France the Church. It was not the same—twice it had changed its identity—and yet it was France. But whether a wandering soul changing dwellings, or a body animated by different spirits, France, through its transmutations, acquired something of a split personality. In its new self the old traits persisted, which could only be understood as atavisms from its past identities. What was France the nation to do with them? What was the place of Catholicism in its national identity? And what significance was it to attach to the memory of its kings? There is no typically French answer to any of these questions, as there is no typically French answer to the question of whether France the nation stood for the liberty of man, as did England and

America, or for the deified State to which man's liberty was subjugated. (Or perhaps to each of them there are two mutually exclusive answers which are equally typical?)

But though the nation France, even as it first asserted itself as such, might be confused as to which gods it worshipped, it never doubted that its was the role of the high priest. It was not just a nation, it was the Great Nation, *la Grande Nation*, the most national of nations, which carried to perfection the virtues required by the new cult.²²³ And in this, too, France remained faithful to her heritage. *La Grande Nation* was the reincarnation of *le roi très chrétien*. Like he of old, the eldest son of the Church, the defender of Christianity, who spread its message with fire and sword, she carried and spread the gospel of Nationality—liberty and equality—with fire and sword. The crusading nation succeeded the crusading king.

Only the heathen, pre-national world did not wait for France, and when she came she was met by converts to the new faith who would never forgive her this presumption.

CHAPTER

3

The
Scythian Rome:
Russia