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The Ideologies and Outcomes of the French and American Revolutions²

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by⁷

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The views expressed in this thesis do not necessarily represent the views of the institution¹⁰
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Abstract.....	v
Introduction	1
CHAPTER 1 - “Secular” Thought.....	3
Early History of Secular Thought.....	3
Secularism and Political Theory	6
Secularism and Progress.....	7
Secularism and “Civic Religion”	10
Secularism Theories (the Secularization Hypothesis).....	11
Fear of Religion and “Aggressive Secularism”	13
Secularism: The Two Models.....	14
CHAPTER 2 - The Ideology Behind the American Revolution.....	17
Biblical Influence.....	18
Deists and Critical Scholarship.....	22
The Bible and Social Contract Theory.....	24
Biblical Morality or Moral Rationalism?	26
Open Marketplace of Religion.....	29
CHAPTER 3 - The Ideology behind the French Revolution.....	32
Top-Down, Not Bottom-Up	32
French <i>Laïcité</i> -- “Militant” Secularism.....	35
Historic Repression of the Bible.....	36
Biblical Criticism in France	37
Anticlericalism.....	40

Ideology as a Replacement for Religion	42
Reason as a Replacement for God	44
From “the Year of Our Lord” to “the Year of the Republic”	46
Rousseau’s “Mandatory” Civil Religion.....	47
Freedom Equals Submission	49
The Great Lawgiver?.....	50
Difficulties Establishing Republicanism	50
CHAPTER 4 - Outcomes of the American Revolution	53
America’s “Relative Theological Consensus”	53
Implications of the Relative Theological Consensus.....	55
Separation of Church and State	59
Church, State, and Schools.....	61
Secularization in America	63
Economic Growth	65
CHAPTER 5 - Outcomes of the French Revolution.....	68
Rousseau and Government of Reason.....	69
Will vs. Reason; Rousseau vs. Montesquieu	71
How Equality Prevented Liberty	73
The National Assembly & the Failure of Democracy.....	77
The Terror.....	79
Thermidor, Directory, and Empire.....	81
Series of Governments	82
A Pattern of Centralization.....	84

Continued Distrust of Religion.....	87	1
Church, State, & School.....	90	
Modern Challenges	92	
CHAPTER 6 - Analysis	95	
CHAPTER 7 - Conclusions	99	
Bibliography.....	102	

Abstract¹

One effective way to compare the fruits of biblical Christianity with modernism is to² contrast the ideologies and outcomes of the American and French Revolutions.

Pre-revolutionary America was rich with biblical influence. Adherents of both³ Protestantism and Deism sought a “Christian society,” and while revolutionaries drew from both biblical Reformation and secular Enlightenment thought, much of the latter was biblical thought in secular form. Ministers employed the Bible extensively to support the Revolution. This relative theological consensus encouraged religious practice and a political system that accommodated dispute. Human rights were secure thanks to man’s subordinate position under God. Even after much secularization, the state has protected the religious rights of groups and parents. America has enjoyed consistent political freedom and stability as well as unparalleled economic and military strength.

In pre-revolutionary France, the Catholic Church suppressed Reformation thought and⁴ bound itself to the monarchy. Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet insisted the Bible was not to be trusted. Rousseau replaced God with an absolute notion of Reason. Cabanis replaced religion with “scientific” ideology. The results were severe anticlericalism and a militant form of secularism known as *laïcité*. The Cult of Reason predicted unanimity, and the Cult of the Nation transformed liberty into conformity with Reason. Instead of limiting power, the French consolidated it and swerved between failed attempts at republicanism and either empire or restored monarchy. Economically, capitalism came later and remained weaker. French religious policy has restricted both religious groups and individual public practice.

The research indicates that biblical influence in a society is the greatest guarantor of⁵ liberty, economic prosperity, and freedom of practice for all religions.

INTRODUCTION¹

During the last century-and-a-half, the United States has experienced a secularization of culture and society. Differing opinions over the intended nature and proper expression of the *separation of church and state* have led to contentious debates over the role of the Bible and associated icons and themes in government, schools, public grounds, and even the practices of deployed military personnel. As a result, not only biblical ethics and morals, but also biblical metaphysical assertions are increasingly excluded from public discourse in favor of what some consider a more “objective” secular philosophy.²

If, however, the philosophical assertions of the Bible are responsible for the positive political and economic outcomes in the United States, and if the corresponding modernist philosophical assumptions behind the French Revolution were responsible for their rapid devolution to the Reign of Terror and authoritarian rule of Napoleon Bonaparte, then the secularization of American society could have disastrous results.³

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and compare the fruits of modernity (including postmodernism) with those of biblical Christianity. In particular, this thesis will compare the philosophical presuppositions behind modernity (atheism, naturalism, materialism, and reductionism) to the philosophical presuppositions promoted in the Bible (theism, supernaturalism, and the importance of biblical revelation). The ultimate hope is to compare the relative historical fruits of the Bible and modernity throughout the modern era, roughly the last five centuries. Because philosophies bear “fruit” through historical events, the object of study can include many revolutionary changes in society (in a broad sense—not strictly “revolutionary wars”). The scope could, therefore, include events in Reformation Germany, the English Civil War, the Glorious “Bloodless” Revolution, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the

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Bolshevik Revolution, post-WWI Fascism and Nazism, the Maoist Revolution, the 1960's counter-culture "Hippie" movement, and even Liberation Theology. Unfortunately, this is far too broad for the scope of a single thesis. 1

This comparison will, therefore, focus on the American and French Revolutions, first identifying the fundamental philosophical underpinnings that each Revolution built on, then comparing the outcomes of each Revolution, and finally attempting to identify whether there may be a causal relationship between the philosophical assumptions and the revolutionary outcomes. 2

CHAPTER 1 - “Secular” Thought¹

Before analyzing the American and French Revolutions, it is important to define and analyze terms clearly. In particular, most such analyses of both Revolutions revolve around degrees of *secularism*, so any fair comparison requires a clear understanding of the concept and its variations. Unfortunately, secularism is often misunderstood and sometimes vilified. It is not, after all, a mere “absence of religion” any more than it is a “lack of religion.” It is actually much more difficult to define.¹

Early History of Secular Thought³

The history of secular thought is far longer than many realize, and it is also more closely tied to Christianity than one might think based on debates over the topic. It may be said to have its roots in the Greek philosophical schools. During the Socratic era, intellectual thought first began to pull away from conventional religious thought, and an “antagonism” developed “between natural philosophy and religion.”² Subsequent to this, two personalities stood out for having done much to establish secular thought. The first was Augustine of Hippo; the second, Thomas Aquinas.

In the 5th century, Augustine tackled difficult questions of political and religious theory in an age where Christians--many of whom had expected Jesus to return by that time--were struggling to determine how best to live in the world while awaiting His return. In his analysis, Augustine established a distinction between the City of God (God’s perfect kingdom to come, for which the church prepares humanity) and the City of Man (the province of the state and

¹ Craig Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism,” *The Hedgehog Review* 12, no. 3 (2010): 35, accessed July 10, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

² Keulman, Kenneth, Review of *Western Atheism: A Short History*, *Journal of Church and State* 42, no. 3 (2000): 577, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

worldly rulers). He never intended, however, to “banish religion from ‘secular’ affairs.”³

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Rather, he reflected on 1) Jesus's command to "give to Caesar" and 2) Paul's command to honor God-ordained authorities in view of the fact that Rome had been sacked and Jesus had not yet returned.

The sacking of Rome in 410 CE was a traumatic event similar to the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in impact to the psyche. Both events ushered in new and innovative thought on politics and security. Since the prevailing world order was collapsing and Jesus had not yet returned, Augustine sought to identify how Christians were to regard the state's authority. His dualism was more between the love of God and love of self than it was between church and state,⁴ but it certainly made room for the latter. As a result, Jesus's teachings, Paul's application of them, and Augustine's interpretations of both all combined to make room for a “secular” state separate from the Church.

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During the 13th century, eight centuries after Augustine and only a short time after the zenith of Roman Catholic power, Thomas Aquinas served as a priest, Dominican friar, theologian, and philosopher. Because he introduced (or perhaps “re-introduced”) Aristotle's writings to European culture and philosophy,⁵ he did much to lay the foundation for later Renaissance and Enlightenment thought. An entire philosophical school, known as Thomism, arose from his work, and one of his presuppositions was that “truth” was to be accepted, no matter the source. The philosophical problem, of course, is how one defines or confirms the veracity of any claim to truth. Because of his assertion, European intellectuals and theologians elevated the Socratic philosophers to a plane equal to the Apostles and the Scriptures.

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³ Calhoun, "Rethinking Secularism," 38.

⁴ Emmet Kennedy, "The Tangled History of Secularism," *Modern Age* 42, no. 1 (Winter, 2000): 32, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

⁵ Kennedy, "The Tangled History of Secularism," 32.

Another of Aquinas's contributions was a "distinction between reason and faith" based ¹ on the writings of an Andalusian, Islamic philosopher, *Abu Walid Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Rushd*, whose name is often Latinized as Averroes. Because of this distinction between reason and faith, subsequent philosophers presupposed them to be antithetical, rather than complementary.⁶ In a real sense, then, Averroes and Aquinas laid the foundation for Kierkegaard's later concept of "blind faith," a conflation of faith with the postmodern abandonment of reason.

With Aquinas, the distinction between sacred and secular took a specific philosophical ² turn. Augustine had made room for secular institutions of state distinct from the Church, something Christians were already accustomed to since the Church had grown under "pagan" Roman rule. Aquinas forced the distinction further, making the Church the province of faith apart from reason, and the state the province of reason apart from faith. This made room for truth-claims within the Church that no longer required the support of reason, and it likewise made room for truth claims in the state that could be completely antithetical to Scripture.

As time went on, modern philosophers concluded God could not be apprehended through ³ reason or rationalism. "The world was secularized in that morality, religion, and politics were excluded from rational analysis and nature was mechanized."⁷ In fact, the growing body of secular thought began to turn against its religious roots. Even the "atheists of classical antiquity" began to offer a "naturalistic explanation for the origins of religion--an attitude that persists in the critique of theism."⁸

⁶ Keulman, Review of *Western Atheism*, 578.

⁷ Kennedy, "The Tangled History of Secularism," 34.

⁸ Keulman, Review of *Western Atheism*, 578.

Secularism and Political Theory¹

By the time of the Renaissance (14th and 15th centuries), atheistic and agnostic speculation that had previously been “at odds with ecclesiastical institutions” found expression, and modern political theory (the thoughts of the writers who inspired the American and French Revolutions) began to take form. Some regard Machiavelli, for example, as “a potent source” of atheism, particularly in his separation of moral virtue (especially of the sovereign) from Christian thought or anthropology.⁹ While Machiavelli was no friend to modern democratic thought, he set the stage for it by reminding his pupil, Lorenzo de Medici, that the people can collectively turn on a prince. In a real sense, then, even “subjects” have some say in their own government. In terms of religious thought, however, Machiavelli (and to a lesser extent, Thomas Hobbes), concluded religion was not useful in the political sphere.¹⁰ For Machiavelli, a truly Christian morality would only weaken a prince and therefore undermine his power. He reasoned that immoral (or at least amoral) actions on the part of a prince could serve the moral purpose of promoting security.

By the 17th century, even more overtly Christian writings further developed thought on the relationship between church and state, sacred and secular. John Locke developed a secularized version of Richard Hooker’s expressly Protestant Christian philosophy. Like Hooker, Locke concluded the government should not establish a religion (though he almost certainly presupposed any “religion” would be a Christian one).¹¹ This form of secular thought sought to keep the state out of the Church, so to speak, without preventing the latter from influencing the former. The Reformation had developed various denominational expressions of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kennedy, "The Tangled History of Secularism," 33.

¹¹ Ibid., 34.

the Church, so political theorists sought a way to maintain a level playing field for their ideas to compete. The “pluralism of society” required some kind of “neutrality, or ‘principled distance’” on the part of the state.¹²

By this time, then, at least two distinct visions of “secularism” developed--one that made a distinction between church and state and another that divorced them completely. One obvious reason was the increasing development of atheistic thought in clear opposition to various expressions of theism. A second reason stemmed from the two opposing historical events that followed the Renaissance. The 16th century saw the Protestant Reformation in northern Europe, which split the reformers from Vatican authority. The 17th century then saw a resurgence of speculative (and often atheistic) thought in the Enlightenment.

Secularism and Progress³

A common thread worthy of analysis among these historical movements is progress. Several societies have each seen impressive scientific movements, for example, but unlike the modern scientific movement in the West, they did not persist. Some fell victim to the fatalism inherent to their worldview of continuity between humanity, divinity, and nature. If nature is subject to the whims of the gods, who in turn are both enslaved to their natural roles and at least occasionally responsive to human manipulation, there is no room for objective science. Another such scientific movement fell victim to the fatalism inherent to Islamic doctrine. Since Islam calls for mankind to accept both good and evil from Allah without question, since there is no express promise of salvation in the Qur’an, and since Allah had changed His mind more than once about critical matters (leading to the doctrine of abrogation), there could be no *optimistic*

¹² Charles Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” *The Hedgehog Review* (Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture), (Fall, 2010): 23, accessed June 30, 2016, http://iasc-culture.org/THR/archives/Fall2010/Taylor_lo.pdf.

expectation of rational order in the universe. Even in Europe, early scientific exploration was losing steam. While the Renaissance had seen impressive scientific development, by the end of his life, even Leonardo da Vinci had abandoned scientific inquiry for art. ¹

Reformation thought took science to new heights. The greatest leap forward came with the Reformation figure, Isaac Newton, whose book, *Principia Mathematica*, laid the philosophical foundation for modern science. Newton built on a realist epistemology that embraced objective reality (and therefore, objective truth), as well as the subject-object distinction. Both of these stemmed directly from the biblical theology of the transcendent God, as well as from the optimism that resulted from salvation by grace. If God is eternal and unchanging, if He expresses Himself both spiritually and naturally, and if His (spiritual) Word leads to spiritual redemption and salvation, then His natural work in creation may also be understood and its challenges overcome. As a result, scientific progress surged forward. ²

Enlightenment thinkers built on Newton's foundation, but they transposed the realist epistemology from its theological foundation to a naturalist, materialist base. Scientific "progress" continued but without its metaphysical foundation. Eventually, science became objectified as the sole, reliable source of knowledge, and its theological foundations were relegated to the "irrational" realm of faith. Enlightenment thought came to contrast reason to "unenlightened versions of faith," and many committed to "comprehensive rationality, the supremacy not just of logic and empirical research but also of systematic, thorough, and exclusive reliance on them."¹³ By the 18th century, the years leading to the Revolutionary Era, Enlightenment thought, having abandoned its theological roots, grew in direct opposition to Catholic authority, especially in southern Europe.¹⁴ ³

¹³ Calhoun, "Rethinking Secularism," 42.

¹⁴ Keulman, Review of *Western Atheism*, 578.

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Not only did technical, scientific progress find its way from a Reformation base to a materialistic one, but also the Reformation's eschatological, millenarian view of history. Reformation theologians looked to a utopian future with Christ's return, and with the Reformation, they began to see impressive technical and social improvements. Enlightenment thinkers likewise embraced a "secular millenarian" view of the future that embodied humanistic notions of progress on a materialistic base, liberated from the social restraints of theology. Enlightenment philosophers "encouraged independent social behavior" by first emphasizing a hope that *change* would necessarily mean *progress* or improvement. Here, instead of being a product of careful thought and hard work, progress became an inevitable result of change. This made room for all manner of nihilistic, revolutionary thought because even destructive change was expected to bring "progress." Second, they emphasized a hope in a "utopian ethic" that would lead to "technical progress to satisfy physical needs, moral progress to lessen violence, [and] political progress towards freedom, equality, and justice."¹⁵ By the 19th century, this theory of progress found bold expression in Marx's restatement of the Hegelian dialectic: that any conflict between "thesis" and "antithesis" necessarily led to the development of a higher "synthesis."

2

By the time of the Revolutionary Era (for purposes of this paper, from 1776 to 1804, when Napoleon became emperor), not only was there unprecedented scientific progress but also there was economic and political progress. Adam Smith began with a biblical notion of stewardship of property and constructed a rational argument for liberal economic theory. His theory led to tremendous economic progress, but the results were tragically uneven. Jean

¹⁵ Jean Bauberot, "Secularism and French Religious Liberty: A Sociological and Historical View," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2003, no. 2 (2003): 456, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

Bauberot, a French historian and sociologist, noted that economic liberalism produced a “world market encircled by a vast shantytown.”¹⁶ Likewise, philosophers (and theologians) like Rousseau, Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, and Calvin developed political theory in a world where power was shifting from the monarchy to the growing middle class. 1

By the end of the Reformation and the start of the Enlightenment [for purposes of this paper, the early 17th century], scientific progress, economic liberalism, and political liberalism all occurred as parallel social and cultural phenomena. It was the different theories of progress, however--biblical vs. humanistic--that led to the widest divergence in where this progress led. Where the prevailing theory of progress was more humanistic and “inevitable,” the “gulf between the ideal and reality” in capitalism (that is, its uneven economic outcomes) led some theorists to advocate “going beyond” capitalism to socialism to overcome the gulf. “It is in this spirit that both Nazism and Communism can be referred to as ‘secular religions.’”¹⁷ 2

Secularism and “Civic Religion” 3

This leads to another component of secular thought worthy of analysis--the idea of civic religion. As Dr. Mark Cladis, Brown University professor of Religious studies, put it: 4

Benjamin Franklin endorsed a civil “Publick Religion” to inculcate civic virtue while at the same time he opposed any state-sponsored traditional religion. And not long before the French Revolution, Rousseau condemned “blood thirsty,” nationalistic traditional religions even as he advocated an enforceable civil religion with tolerance as its centerpiece.¹⁸ 5

James Madison is said to have interpreted Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms, civil and spiritual (an apparent restatement of Augustine’s thesis), as “an account of the separation of 6

¹⁶ Bauberot, “Secularism and French Religious Liberty,” 458.

¹⁷ Ibid., 457

¹⁸ Mark Cladis, “Religion, Secularism, and Democratic Culture,” *The Good Society* 19, no. 2 (2010): 22, accessed June 30, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/goodsociety.19.2.0022>.

church and state.”¹⁹ Of course, “Americans have passionately argued over the meaning and utility of the Wall of Separation.”²⁰ A critical part of this discussion was the development of a “civil or political religion,” which, unlike confessional or traditional religion, “has the sociological and psychological form of traditional religion (enduring beliefs and practices, powerful ideas and symbols, tutored passions and emotions) but...does not have the traditionally religious content.”²¹

Cladis refers to this as “civic religion” and defines it similarly as those aspects of a group’s civic life that take on the “sociological and psychological form of religion (deep beliefs and practices, ideas, and symbols, for example) without necessarily having any traditionally religious content.”²²

What is noteworthy for discussion here is that both the American Revolution and the French Revolution involved establishing some form of civic religion. This was not necessarily meant to supplant or displace confessional religion, but rather to prevent historical excesses such as the British Puritan Interregnum or even Calvin’s reign in Geneva. As such, most do not regard civic religion as “dangerous.” Rather, “democratic civil religions offer protection from totalitarian and theocratic religion, among other varieties of antidemocratic movements.”²³

Secularization Theories (the Secularization Hypothesis)

This analysis has already shown that two overarching visions of secularism were developed throughout history. The first made a distinction between church and state; the second sought to divorce them completely. The first grew from a view of progress based on Protestant

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cladis, “Religion, Secularism, and Democratic Culture,” 22.

²² Ibid., 22.

²³ Ibid.

eschatological views of the coming Millennial Reign of Christ, as well as on God's providential work in and through society. The second grew from a materialistic restatement of the Protestant view of progress, based instead on a humanistic belief in the inevitability of progress, whether social, economic, or political. 1

The second vision commonly found expression in "secularization theories." For example, Bauberot states this in mild form when he asserts that a society becomes "secularized" when there is "(1) a decrease in the portion of wealth devoted to the 'supernatural', (2) an increased independence of social behaviors from religion, linked to the idea that social practices change living conditions, and (3) an increasing justification of institutions functioning with little or no tie to religion."²⁴ 2

Sometimes they are more explicit. Bauberot defines four stages of "secularism": 3

- 1) [A]ppropriation of ecclesiastical goods by the civil state. For example, the Protestant Reformation saw this in the German Empire. Also, the French Revolution saw the sale of Roman Catholic properties;
- 2) "The rise of the "soft" human sciences, secularization theories, and the "paradox of outcomes," that capitalism (a fruit of religious thought) tends to pull people away from religion";
- 3) "the process [in the third quarter of the 20th Century] by which the sectors of society and culture are freed from the authority of religious institutions and symbols"; and
- 4) "a more common, or 'vulgar,' vision of secularization [that] has made religion a sort of relic, destined to disappear sooner or later as the world's diverse societies proceed to modernity."²⁵ 4

This "vulgar" vision is secularization theory, which builds on the humanistic vision of progress and therefore assumes that religion is a "fad" that will pass away as people become more enlightened. Bauberot notes that this fourth stage has proven to be wrong, for the turn of the last millennium turned out to be "furiously religious."²⁶ Forces of "counter-secularization," 5

²⁴ Bauberot, "Secularism and French Religious Liberty," 453.

²⁵ Ibid., 452-4.

²⁶ Ibid.

he says, have become just as significant.²⁷ As Cladis put it, “We had assumed that modernity would necessarily usher in an age in which religion had no significant public standing. We were wrong. Religion as an intellectual, cultural, and political force is not, for the most part, waning on the globe.”²⁸

The unfortunate result of secularization theory has been that “religious populations [have been] stigmatized—implicitly or explicitly—by these secularists, and religious resentment [has been] growing all around us.”²⁹

Fear of Religion and “Aggressive Secularism”³

Closely related to secularization theory has been a growing distrust of religion vis-à-vis the state, particularly among those who embrace the second vision of secularism. According to Cladis, “Political liberalism, broadly understood, has taken to heart the profound lesson that traditional or confessional religions can contribute to extremely dangerous political and social outcomes.”³⁰ By this, one might assume he is referring to the 30-Years War and similar conflicts arising from the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, or perhaps to the failure of the British Interregnum. He continues:

We also know about the terror that can flow from a different kind of religion. In the twentieth century, catastrophic murder and suffering is associated with what some call political or civil religion, that is, with political and civil institutions that became charged with the sacred and functioned in many ways as a religion. Mussolini’s fascism, Hitler’s Nazism, and Russian Bolshevism have all been plausibly described as religious, when suitably defined by something like a broad, Durkheimian account of religion.³¹

²⁷ Ibid., 454.

²⁸ Cladis, “Religion, Secularism, and Democratic Culture,” 22.

²⁹ Ibid., 25.

³⁰ Ibid., 23.

³¹ Ibid.

Here, the “secular” assumption is that religion “is based on beliefs not subject to public reasoning,” and therefore “religion is potentially divisive.” This leads to what he describes as the “standard liberal approach,” which is to “keep religion private,” that is, “to protect the secular state from encroaching religion by consigning religion to the private sphere—the sphere of the apolitical voluntary association, the family, or the individual.”³² According to this approach, the mere thought of religion in politics leads to fear and suspicion, so advocates “pursue aggressive *laïcité* or secularism and keep all religion out of political life.”³³

The dark side of this approach is that, in the defense of liberalism, people must employ what Cladis refers to as “illiberal means” to achieve “privatization of religion.” By forcing religion into the corner, advocates of this model also rob society of a priceless source of values, because “religious perspectives potentially have much to contribute to shared moral and political projects of nations and global communities.”³⁴

Secularism: The Two Models

While some of the historical events analyzed here occurred much later than either revolution compared in this paper, they provide valuable insight into the philosophical foundations behind them--foundations that existed during the Revolutionary Era. The two overarching models of secularism are therefore clear.

The first model followed a line of reasoning from Augustine to the Reformation. It permitted (and eventually encouraged) a distinction between church and state. It grew from a view of progress based on a Protestant Millenarian view of history in which God is working providentially in and through society toward a culmination in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 24.

³⁴ Ibid., 23-24.

It held to a realist epistemology and a classical liberal approach to politics and economics. ¹

Rather than diminishing the importance of religion, it sought “the pluralization of religious forms” in which “religious entrepreneurs must compete” as a hallmark of secularization.³⁵

In this model, religion played a vital, though possibly restrained, role. According to ² Bauberot, this “secularism in the good sense” entailed three ideal features:

- 1) when participating in the public and political realms, citizens do not normally assume that others necessarily share their religious perspectives or perspectives on religion;
- 2) citizens do not treat religious perspectives in public debate as a special case subject to special exclusion or special privilege; and
- 3) government neither officially sponsors nor hinders religion, upholding the First Amendment. The first two features of secularism (in the good sense) pertain to constraints on citizens, and the third on government.³⁶

The second model of secularism followed a line of reasoning through Thomas Aquinas to ⁴ a complete distinction between “reason” and “faith.” Because it made room for truth claims in religion that are independent of reason and truth claims in the state that are antithetical to religion, it ultimately divorced the state from the church entirely. This “aggressive secularism” built on a set of atheistic or agnostic philosophical presuppositions: atheism (or Deism--in either case for which God is considered irrelevant to modern history), naturalism (the presupposition that the natural realm constitutes the whole of the universe), and materialism (the philosophy that holds to the existence of a physical, material explanation for all phenomena, including that which appears to be immaterial). Adherents of this view developed a materialistic restatement of the Protestant view of progress, based instead on a humanistic belief in the inevitability of progress, whether social, economic, or political, a view that made room for nihilistic views of conflict and progress.

This “secularism in the bad sense” is characterized by three beliefs: ⁵

³⁵ Bauberot, “Secularism and French Religious Liberty,” 454.

³⁶ Cladis, “Religion, Secularism, and Democratic Culture,” 23-24.

1) religion is a discrete, sui generis phenomenon;
2) religion is not self-critical or open to critique and exchange (because, it is held, religion is radically subjective or based on dogmatic authority or on both); and therefore
3) religious citizens can and should accept the privatization of religion, that is, they should keep their religion out of politics. These three positions presuppose a narrow, parochial view of religion....³⁷

This model of aggressive secularism moved beyond notions of privatizing religion “for the sake of a pact of nonaggression” to a view that “religion is a destructive, superstitious relic of the past that has no place in modernity.” It holds tightly to the secularization hypothesis (despite evidence to the contrary) in the belief that in the modern age, humans are “enlightened and freed from the shackles of religion.” The assertion is clear: “Secularism is the essence of modernity and religion is the antithesis of all that is modern.”³⁸ Cladis called it “the ugly sense of secularism.”³⁹

The extent to which either of these models affected the American and French Revolutions will become apparent in the next two sections. What is already clear is that this is not merely a comparison of the religious and the secular. Rather, because there are at least two overarching models of what constitutes a secular regime,⁴⁰ this is a comparison of those two divergent models.

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 23.

CHAPTER 2 - The Ideology Behind the American Revolution ¹

The ideology behind the American Revolution has been a contentious topic for many years, especially with respect to the Bible's influence. Some see it as a completely secular endeavor, while others see it as the product of Divine Providence. For example, James S. Valliant, an author who proposes Roman emperors "invented" Christianity, asserts: "The Founders were men of the Enlightenment," the "defining characteristic" for which "was man's application of reason to every concern."¹ He sees in the Enlightenment a clear sequence of thought from 1) Aquinas's reintroduction of Aristotle "into a world dominated by unadulterated Christianity for more than a millennia [sic]" (the "era of the Scholastics"), to 2) the Renaissance, ("the Rebirth of Reason"), and finally to 3) the Enlightenment.² Notably, he appears to discount any influence on the Enlightenment from the intervening historical event: the Reformation. After claiming the American Revolution was a product of the Enlightenment, he continues, "The advancements of the Enlightenment were driven not by faith-based theology but by observation-based rationality."³ Alex McCrossen, professor of history at Southern Methodist University, notes that a 1967 "classic" text by Bernard Bailyn on the Revolution contains "many references to Rome, a couple to Greece, and none to the Old or New Testament."⁴ According to McCrossen, in the years to follow the publication of Bailyn's text, historians tended to focus on "how familiarity with ancient history and the classics informed American political and artistic culture."⁵

¹ J.S. Valliant, "The New Testament versus the American Revolution," *The Objective Standard*, 10, no. 2, (Summer 2015): 36, accessed August 7, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

² Ibid., 37.

³ Ibid., 36.

⁴ Alex McCrossen, "American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War," *Journal Of The Early Republic* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 771, accessed August 7, 2016. America: History and Life with Full Text, EBSCOhost.

⁵ Ibid.

This is not to say that such scholars successfully demonstrated the complete absence of biblical influence on the American Revolution. Even Valliant, who claims the Revolution “was driven not by faith and self-sacrifice but by reason and self-interest” concedes: “Of course, many of the Founders were not Christians but rather were deists. Even these Founders, however, were influenced substantially by aspects of Christian thought.”⁶ Other scholars like McCrossen have completely departed from Bailyn’s model of secular origins and assert, for example, “how profoundly the Old Testament influenced political debate and reflection in the United States between the Revolution and the 1830s.”⁷ He notes that prominent early American figures like Lyman Beecher “believed that the American Constitution came from the Bible, not Rome or Greece.”⁸

Biblical Influence

What is more certain than the Bible’s direct influence on the Revolution is its profound influence on the colonial culture of the time. Assertions range from descriptions of the American colonies as a “biblically literate society”⁹ to noting the Bible was “omnipresent” in the “presecularized” colonies in the years before the Revolution.¹⁰ One leading church historian, Dr. Mark Noll, went so far as to identify the Bible as “the nation's *vade mecum* in times of crisis,”¹¹ and McCrossen quotes historian Eran Shalev, who notes that during and after the Revolution, people’s understanding of the Bible “placed the United States in a biblical time frame,” and

⁶ Valliant, “The New Testament versus the American Revolution,” 45.

⁷ McCrossen, “American Zion,” 771.

⁸ Ibid., 772.

⁹ Seth Perry, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution*. *Journal Of Religion* 94, no. 3 (July 2014): 413, accessed August 7, 2016, Religion and Philosophy Collection, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰ Eran Shalev, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution*. *Journal Of American History* 101, no. 1 (June 2014): 245-246.

¹¹ Perry, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 414.

“conditioned contemporaries to think of an American mission in biblical terms.”¹² In fact, even ¹ the argument that “the prominence of the Bible in the lives of Americans began to decline in the first half of the nineteenth century,”¹³ is evidence of the Bible's significance during the revolutionary century that preceded it.

Another well-documented fact is that many revolutionaries appealed to the Bible to ² support, defend, and motivate the Revolution. James P. Byrd, who contradicts Bailyn’s secular position, observes “the Bible was a major source of rhetoric supporting the American Revolution.”¹⁴ While the American Revolution may not have been a “religious revolt,” he notes, “the Bible was a central channel for inspiring revolutionary sentiments.”¹⁵ In 1966, the year before the publication of Bailyn’s text, scholars like the late Professor Alan Heimert of Harvard “controversially depicted evangelical religion as a major factor in the coming of the American Revolution.”¹⁶ Even critics of the Revolution made similar observations. Loyalist Peter Oliver wrote in the eighteenth century of how the “dissenting clergy” played a prominent role in the rebellion against British authority.¹⁷

James Byrd’s contribution to scholarship on the subject has been remarkable. He studied ³ 543 sermons or pamphlets that included 17,148 biblical citations¹⁸ over a period from 1764 to

¹² McCrossen, “American Zion,” 773.

¹³ W. Terry Lindley, “An American Bible: a History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880.” *Baptist History and Heritage* 35, no. 2 (2000): 92, General OneFile, accessed August 7, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login>.

¹⁴ Amanda Porterfield, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution*. *American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (April 2014): 517, accessed August 7, 2016, Military & Government Collection, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵ Shalev, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 246.

¹⁶ James S. Kabala, “Clergymen and Infidels in the American Revolution and Early Republic,” *History: Reviews Of New Books* 42, no. 4 (October 2014): 111, accessed August 7, 2016, America: History and Life with Full Text, EBSCOhost.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

1800¹⁹ to analyze how the clergy found justification, moral support, and even imperatives in the Bible. He concluded, “Ministers played a critical role in providing religious motivation for soldiers, officers, and even civilians as they embraced the war with Britain,” helping them “overcome both fear and moral scruples.”²⁰ He notes, “Killing for the cause of American independence was...not presumed to have unconditional divine support.”²¹ Ergo, people searched the Scripture for guidance.

One mitigating factor to the claim for biblical inspiration to the Revolution is that, while research clearly indicates eighteenth-century sermons were replete with biblical support for the revolution, it is not as clear what impact those sermons had or how well they were received.²² It is more difficult to establish how “Bible-based rhetoric” from the clergy affected “individual belief and action” among the laity.²³ Whether the Bible was more a *tool* than a *source* is also not clear. Some argue that the Bible was not so much the original inspiration for the Revolution, because “commitment to one political side or another came first, and biblical justifications for that commitment came later.”²⁴

Such controversies find expression in varying interpretations of biblical imperatives. Revolutionaries, for example, “struggled with loyalist claims that Peter and Paul condemned rebellion against civil authority....”²⁵ Their solution was that they “read the apostles through a republican prism.”²⁶ Alexis McCrossen is another scholar who “redresses the scholarly neglect

¹⁹ Porterfield, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 517.

²⁰ Perry, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 414.

²¹ Glenn A. Moots, Review of *Sacred War, Sacred Scripture: The Bible and the American Revolution Roger Sherman and the Creation of the American Republic*. *Journal of Religious History* 38, no. 1 (March 2014): 161, accessed August 7, 2016, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

²² Porterfield, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 517.

²³ Perry, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 414.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Shalev, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 246.

²⁶ Ibid.

of the role of the Old Testament ‘in the formation and evolution of an American republican worldview’” by drawing attention to this “prism,” which he defines as “biblical republicanism.”²⁷ Likewise, Byrd notes what he calls “Hebraic republicanism” in Revolutionary War sermons and notes that Thomas Paine, in his *Common Sense*, used the Bible “as a historical document supporting arguments against monarchy.”²⁸ Byrd even notes that with otherwise awkward passages like Romans 13, where Paul clearly advocates respect for government, pro-Revolution ministers were able to argue “the verses did not apply to tyrants who violated preexisting laws, which were the real powers that be.”²⁹ McCrossen asserts that the revolutionaries saw in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, “a narrative of resistance to tyranny,” which “gave them a language and discourse through which they could talk about tyranny and republican virtue.”³⁰ Ironically, because of this analysis, the same passage that advocated respect for authorities became a source of security after the revolution, serving as “a biblical safeguard against unbridled liberty and radical republicanism.”³¹

Some, on the other hand, see even clearer theological sources for the revolutionaries’ arguments. Byrd, for example, asserts that Roger Sherman, one of the “forgotten founders” who was instrumental in drafting both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, based his political theory on his Reformed theology. He places more weight on “Reformed Protestant arguments for resistance” than on the more common (and more secular) “Lockean” founding.³² Professor Glenn Moots of Princeton and Northwood University notes, however, that there is

²⁷ McCrossen, “American Zion,” 772.

²⁸ Porterfield, Review of *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 517.

²⁹ Kabala, “Clergymen and Infidels in the American Revolution and Early Republic,” 112.

³⁰ McCrossen, “American Zion,” 772.

³¹ Kabala, “Clergymen and Infidels in the American Revolution and Early Republic,” 112.

³² Moots, Review of *Sacred War, Sacred Scripture*, 161.

“very little of a paper trail between Reformed theology and Sherman himself,” making it difficult¹ to determine whether “natural rights, limited government by consent, and the right of resistance *necessarily* owed to Reformed Protestant theology [emphasis original].”³³ Even “Lockean” origins do not demonstrate any lack of biblical foundation, however. At the very least, these alternative claims suggest that American political theory derives from *both* Sherman's Reformed theology *and* Richard Hooker's Anglican theology filtered through Locke's secular perspective (a point that will be demonstrated below).

What is clear is that the society at large felt it important to draw upon the Bible for² justification and inspiration. Based on Byrd's analysis and the density of biblical citations in the sermons and writings, it is easy to see that “Americans of the revolutionary era were, clearly, deeply immersed in scripture,”³⁴ and biblical support appears to be the best explanation for “the surge of popular opinion in colonial conventions during the spring of 1776.”³⁵

Deists and Critical Scholarship³

Another point of contention over biblical influence on the Revolution stems from the⁴ advent of critical biblical scholarship at the time. This objection appears to stem from an “all or nothing” approach to philosophical influence. If revolutionaries may not have believed the Bible completely, how can it have played a role in the Revolution? Indeed, some revolutionaries did hold heterodox beliefs. As naturalist philosophers came to conflate biblical faith with the irrational, “philosophers like Locke and other English Deists” made a concerted effort to “prune

³³ Ibid., 162.

³⁴ Kabala, “Clergymen and Infidels in the American Revolution and Early Republic,” 112.

³⁵ J.R. Pole, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution* by Morton White and *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* by Garry Wills, *Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 2 (1979): 273, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27553698>.

away what is irrational” from the Bible.³⁶ Since adherence to Christianity was fashionable and expected, deists tended to lead a double life, “moving in respectable circles and seemingly conventional in their religious views, but privately collecting heterodox publications.”³⁷ The works they quietly produced “focus on the sayings of Jesus, providing a vivid image of a moralist and teacher...omit[ting] practically all of the miraculous events narrated in the gospels.”³⁸ Their beliefs included the idea that Jesus “was a mere man who taught great moral truths,” with a corresponding “aversion to orthodox doctrines such as the Trinity and the atonement.”³⁹ A good example is Thomas Jefferson. In 1820, he “snipped verses from the first four gospels, rearranged these in a new order, and pasted the clippings into blank sheets, forming an improved version of the New Testament to his liking.”⁴⁰

Jefferson is representative of a subset of the revolutionaries who straddled Christian and naturalist philosophies. Jefferson found morality not in organized religion, but rather in “obeying the moral sense implanted by God” that focused on “social utility.”⁴¹ “Above all, follow your reason,” he is noted for saying, “because nothing true in religion could be contrary to it.”⁴² Apart from a few private communications, Jefferson “remained publicly silent about his religious sentiments.”⁴³ Lynn Zastoupil, professor of history at Rhodes College in Tennessee, notes, while observing the clear influences of Unitarianism on Jefferson, that because of his

³⁶ Eugene Bertram Schwarzbach, “Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason.” *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2011): 458, accessed August 7, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

³⁷ Lynn Zastoupil, “‘Notorious and convicted mutilators’: Rammohun Roy, Thomas Jefferson, and the Bible,” *Journal of World History* 20, no. 3 (2009): 421, accessed August 7, 2016, General Reference Center GOLD, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

³⁸ Ibid., 415.

³⁹ Ibid., 416.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 415.

⁴¹ Ibid., 417.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 420.

efforts to reconstruct the Bible on naturalist terms, Jefferson was able to embrace a Christian identity he otherwise found impossible to adopt.⁴⁴

John Locke and Isaac Newton also appear to fit this model. While it is not clear to what extent either of them adopted any particular unorthodox doctrines, they did leave documented evidence that they at least gave them consideration.⁴⁵ What is noteworthy here is that, while such people may have lived outside of a completely biblical set of beliefs, they still demonstrated the Bible's influence on their own beliefs. For example, in 1803, after the Revolution, "President Jefferson compiled a syllabus comparing the ethical doctrines of several ancient philosophers, the Jews, and Jesus" that he sent only to "a few friends and family members," and declared Jesus's moral system to be "the most perfect and sublime that has ever been taught by man."⁴⁶

The Bible and Social Contract Theory³

One less frequently explored means of biblical influence on the Revolution is the development of Social Contract Theory. The Reformation's theological emphasis on individual moral autonomy before God spilled over into political theory. In this way, Christian ideas introduced a "revolution" into political philosophy, specifically the "ethical components of contractarianism," which included "autonomy, responsibility, duty, authorization, and willing."⁴⁷ As a result, "consent or agreement based on will, understood as a moral 'faculty,' came to occupy a place in...political philosophy which it had never occupied before."⁴⁸ This shift was

⁴⁴ Ibid., 417 and 424.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 421.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 418-419.

⁴⁷ Patrick Riley, "How Coherent is the Social Contract Position?" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34, No. 4. (Oct. - Dec., 1973), p. 548.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

clear in the Declaration of Independence, which asserts “governments derive their 'just powers' from the consent of the governed.”⁴⁹ The American Revolution ushered in the age of “Social Contract Theory,” whereby “political legitimacy, political authority, and political obligations are derivative from the consent of those who create a government.”⁵⁰ In the century that followed, “consent emerged as the leading doctrine of political legitimacy.”⁵¹ In short, the idea of the “good” state gave way to the idea of the “legitimate” state.⁵² As someone else put it, “We have in the modern state a new kind of collective agency,” where “the notion of popular will plays a crucial role in the legitimating idea.”⁵³ The modern state faces and addresses questions “for which there are no analogues in most premodern forms: what/whom is this state for? whose freedom? whose expression?”⁵⁴

The idea that Social Contract Theory derives from Christian thought is not without controversy, but according to Patrick Riley, while some attribute its development to the postmodern focus on will (voluntarism), it is more accurate to acknowledge that even voluntarism arose from Christian roots. “The freedom to conform voluntarily to absolute standards had always been important in Christian doctrine.” Further, he claims:

[T]he Reformation doubtless strengthened the element of individual choice and responsibility in moral thinking, while subordinating the role of moral authority. And it was natural enough that the Protestant view of individual moral autonomy should spill over from theology and moral philosophy into politics, forming the intellectual basis of contract theory.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Ibid., 543.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 545.

⁵³ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 30.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Riley, “How Coherent is the Social Contract Position?”, 544.

Biblical Morality or Moral Rationalism? ¹

Another point of contention is whether American political theory derives from biblical anthropology and morality or rather from naturalism and moral rationalism. Again, Jefferson is the typical case in question. He was attracted both to *moral rationalism*--which, according to John Locke, "held that political conclusions can be inferred from self-evident premises"--and Scottish *moral sense philosophy*, which held that we sense and feel--not infer--moral values.⁵⁶ These are the ideas from which philosophers derived *natural law*, an ambiguous concept to modern ears. In his review of Morton White's *Philosophy of the American Revolution*, J.R. Pole provides a helpful definition:

Natural law differs from physical law because the decision to be bound by natural law involves free choice. A fire cannot choose not to burn; but a man can choose not to do his duty, just as he may choose not to exercise his right. A man may even choose not to be guided by the evidence of his senses: but no one else can make that choice for him because no one can experience the evidence of another's senses. That is why natural rights cannot be alienated, that is, voluntarily made over for another to exercise or to refrain from exercising.⁵⁷

The *source* of natural law is the question, and the term leaves room for readers to assume either Divine or natural origins. There is little doubt of Locke's influence on Jefferson's view of morality and natural law. While conventional wisdom holds that Jefferson most likely read Locke's *Second Treatise* before the Declaration of Independence, some contest this. Even so, the late Harvard Professor Morton White contends in his pivotal work, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, that Jefferson's language--self-evident truths, inalienable rights, laws of nature, and man's essence, for example--betrays a heavy influence by the writings of Swiss jurist

⁵⁶ W. Gerber, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 41, no. 4 (1981): 566, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2107263>.

⁵⁷ Pole, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, 272.

Jean Jacques Burlamaqui, “one of the more effective transmitters of Locke's ideas.”⁵⁸ As a result, Jefferson's ideas appeared to have been a “Burlamaquian” blend of Locke's *moral rationalism* and Scottish *moral sense philosophy*.⁵⁹

What is apparent, then, is a combination of biblical and naturalistic origins--from which Jefferson and others borrowed--for the morality of the Declaration of Independence. In both *moral sense philosophy* and Lockean *moral rationalism*, a fine line exists between individual moral autonomy under God and a more subjective, humanist view. For some, the “moral sense” exists because God writes the law on human hearts; for others, it is merely “natural.” What’s more, even John Locke relied heavily on Richard Hooker’s (an Anglican priest) theological writings as the basis for his own philosophy,⁶⁰ which was really a secular restatement of them. For example, it was from Hooker that Locke found the “postulation of human equality as the foundation of the reciprocal duties humans owe one another.”⁶¹ What is notable, then, is that the Declaration of Independence employs both *moral rationalism* in its assertion that truths are “self-evident,” and a biblical view by citing that men are “endowed by their Creator” with certain rights.

These foundations led to a unique expression of “qualified egalitarianism,” especially for Jefferson. While some scholars argue that “the central impulses of the [American Revolution] were highly egalitarian,”⁶² Morton White argues that for Jefferson, “the power to see self-evidence was attributed to a specific group and not to every person.”⁶³ This specific group of

⁵⁸ Jack P. Greene, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 1 (Summer, 1980): 167, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/203007>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Irving M. Zeitlin, *Rulers and Ruled: An Introduction of Classical Political Theory from Plato to the Federalists*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 113.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Greene, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, 168.

⁶³ Ibid.

people “had much leisure [and] improved understandings” and were better able to discern “self-evident” moral truths.⁶⁴ White even asserts Jefferson subscribed to Aristotle's notion that “some men were slaves by nature” and questioned whether they “possessed enough rational power to warrant inclusion in the species man.”⁶⁵

Locke, too, had “identified several classes of people who could not or would not perceive the self-evident...,” and so “...the thinking of Jefferson and his contemporaries developed within a derived system in which some truths were more self-evident than others, depending on the propensities of the minds to which they were presented...”⁶⁶ Based on this view, “the people” for Jefferson “are those, and only those, who have the capacity or will to grasp the truths of natural law.”⁶⁷ This is why Jefferson sought something analogous to (but not identical to) “property qualifications for voters.”⁶⁸ The dark side of such assertions is obvious. In a broader sense, however, “a faith in all the people was not one of the philosophical ideas advocated in the [American] Revolutionary era.”⁶⁹ However, this is not to say that Jefferson felt some people would remain forever disenfranchised based on capability: “Jefferson's optimism gave him hope for the educability of the people, in contrast to Locke's characteristic pessimism.”⁷⁰

Burlamaqui's influence on Jefferson also found expression in his influence on the rights asserted in the Declaration of Independence. On the one hand, a more overtly biblical source for those rights seems apparent, because based on Burlamaqui's influence, Jefferson believed it was “undeniable (but not self-evident) that the right to preserve life, to preserve liberty, and to pursue

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Pole, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, 271.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 271-272.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Greene, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, 169.

⁷⁰ Pole, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, 272.

happiness, were derived from the self-evident truth of equal creation.”⁷¹ On the other hand, 1
Burlamaqui’s influence explains why Jefferson replaced Locke’s right to property with the
pursuit of happiness:

Jefferson...distinguished between inalienable rights, which came directly from God and 2
included life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and adventitious rights, which, like
property, derived from man's own actions and were therefore renounceable. Because
man's duty to God required him to preserve-by rebellion, if necessary-only the former, it
was obviously inappropriate to include an adventitious right such as property.⁷²

This difference in the “trilogy of rights” is a significant one between the American and French 3
Revolutions.

The American Revolution, then, derived from a combination of biblical and naturalistic 4
philosophy and found much moral support and justification in the Bible. The American
implementation of “civic religion”--or at least of what Jean-Jacques Rousseau called a strong
“philosophy of civility,” promoting the three norms of “1) human rights, 2) equality and
nondiscrimination, and 3) democracy”⁷³--was “clearly part of God’s providential plan for
mankind,”⁷⁴ as seen in the assertion, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are
created equal....” As Bauberot put it, “In...the United States..., religion contributed in various
ways to secularization and particularly to the development of a democratic sociability.”⁷⁵

Open Marketplace of Religion 5

Whether one points more to *moral sense* or *moral rationalism*, Jefferson's and Madison's 6
rejection of all forms of religious intolerance follows logically from these positions. “The

⁷¹ Ibid., 272.

⁷² Greene, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, 167-8.

⁷³ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 32.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Bauberot, “Secularism and French Religious Liberty,” 459.

evidence of religion which is present to my senses cannot be directly known to yours, and I cannot receive from another person any evidence which is not directly known to me.”⁷⁶ The “secularism” of the United States’ (U.S.) Constitution, in contrast to French revolutionary secularism, sought merely to prohibit established churches. The result, rather than suppression of faith, was to create what some called a “sort of marketplace of religions.”⁷⁷ An ironic result is that the American separation of church and state “has been conducive to high levels of religious belief and participation.”⁷⁸ The goal of American “state neutrality” has been “to avoid favoring or disfavoring not just religious positions, but any basic position, religious or nonreligious.”⁷⁹ Indeed, Marx's later condemnation of American society was telling. American society had not achieved true secularism, in his opinion. As Emmet Kennedy, Professor of History at the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, summarized Marx, “The separation of church and state in the United States,” he opined, “atheized the state, but not civil society, which was still religious...”⁸⁰

In the decades following the Revolution, the Bible profoundly impacted American society, including the government. By the 1830s, the word “secularism” had not entered into American public life (unlike France, where *laïcité* became a battle cry). Separation of church and state at the time left a role for religion in public life that is much more controversial today. In the 1830s, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story allowed for one “to invoke the principles of Christianity in interpreting the law,” because the point of the separation clause was merely “to

⁷⁶ Pole, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, 273.

⁷⁷ Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism,” 37.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁹ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 25.

⁸⁰ Kennedy, “The Tangled History of Secularism,” 35.

exclude all rivalry among Christian sects,” since virtually all religion in America was Christian.⁸¹ 1
Indeed, in 1892, the Supreme Court unanimously declared the U.S. to be a “Christian nation.”⁸²

Still, potential tensions within this system were likely from the outset. The First 2
Amendment embodies two goals: the first is the rejection of establishment; the second is the
guarantee of “free exercise.” As a result, “It is not inconceivable that these should conflict.”⁸³
Any final solution to dilemmas that may arise from the tension between secular “state neutrality”
and religious expression still eludes Americans for, after all, a “really diverse democracy can't
revert to a civil religion, or antireligion...without betraying its own principles.”⁸⁴ At best, we
can remain in an “overlapping consensus.”⁸⁵

As we will see in the next chapter, the French model, especially during the First 3
Republic, was very different, a “non- or even antireligious ideology,”⁸⁶ sometimes described as a
“militant *laïcité*.”⁸⁷

⁸¹ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 26.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 32.

⁸⁷ Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism,” 42.

CHAPTER 3 - The Ideology behind the French Revolution¹

In 1789, King Louis XVI convened the Estates General, which set off a chain of events that came to a head on 21 September 1792, when the National Convention officially abolished the French monarchy and first declared France a free republic.¹ Because the French Revolution followed quickly on the heels of the American Revolution, the two events are often compared as if they stemmed from similar ideologies. The differences, however, are much greater than the similarities. The American Revolution, for instance, was a mere “secession” from England. The French Revolution, on the other hand, was a true insurgent rebellion that led to a complete power change (several, in fact). What is more, in the American Revolution, the Constitution, once written, was never to be replaced, “unlike the repeated French efforts to establish a desirable and lasting version,” and the king, once rejected, was never to be replaced by another.²

What caused the French Revolution is the subject of hot debate: “At present, no comprehensive explanation for the coming of the Revolution exists...[and] it is unlikely that one will emerge.”³ This thesis, however, is not a quest to explain the origins of the Revolution, but instead, to explore the worldview(s) the revolutionaries embraced.

Top-Down, not Bottom-Up⁴

Origins of the Revolution are therefore of concern only insofar as they demonstrate ideology. According to Gail Bossenga, Professor of History at the College of William and Mary, Tocqueville first described the Revolution in more structural terms as “the culmination of the

¹ David Ciavatta, “The Event of Absolute Freedom: Hegel on the French Revolution and Its Calendar,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 40, no. 6 (2014): 584, accessed August 27, 2016. <http://psc.sagepub.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/content/40/6/577>.

² Jennifer Heuer, “Liberty and Death: The French Revolution.” *History Compass* 5, no. 1 (January 2007): 194, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2006.00362.x/epdf>.

³ Gail Bossenga, “Origins of the French Revolution.” *History Compass* 5, no. 4 (2007): 1294, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00448.x/epdf>.

process of centralization.”⁴ After 1) Tocqueville's more “traditional” description, scholarly descriptions of its causes moved from 2) Marxist apologetics (that oversimplified it as a clash between classes in accordance with the Marxist model), to 3) various forms of revisionism (which sought more complex structural explanations, focusing on financial and ideological “discourses” and contexts during the Revolution's various phases, and focusing more recently on “political culture,” as expressed in symbols, rituals, and media).⁵ While any or all of these explanations are telling in terms of ideology, they are also prone to certain dangers. Marxist explanations were given to “economic determinism,” while revisionist explanations have often given way to “ideological determinism,”⁶ an excess the author of this thesis seeks to avoid. The “radical” historians (apologists for Marxism) who displaced “conservative” explanations during the twentieth century until the 1980s, explained it in Marxist terms as an “inexorable march of distinct aristocratic, bourgeois, peasant, and proletarian phases.”⁷ Later critiques of Marxist explanations are revealing. While Marxism would have predicted a “bottom-up” revolutionary progression in France from feudalism to capitalism (before progressing inevitably to socialism and communism), others note that this did not happen. Instead, “contrary to radical orthodoxy, the French Revolution likely retarded rather than advanced the progress of capitalism,” and peasants “clung stubbornly to the old communal mode of organization.”⁸ As such, it was much more of a “top-down” revolution than Marxism expects. Some describe it instead as “essentially a political revolution with social consequences and not a social revolution with political

⁴ Ibid., 1298.

⁵ Heuer, “Liberty and Death”, 175-176.

⁶ Ibid., 179.

⁷ Hugh Ragsdale, “Comparative Historiography of the Social History of Revolutions: English, French, and Russian,” *Journal Of The Historical Society* 3, no. 3/4 (2003): 328.

⁸ Ibid., 328.

consequences,” or alternatively--for those who prefer social over political explanations--a “social revolution from above”⁹ more akin to the later Stalinist model.¹⁰ 1

The “top-down” nature of the French Revolution may be partly explained by the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As Professor Hugh Ragsdale of the University of Alabama wrote of Rousseau’s influence, “Everything depended fundamentally on politics, and . . . no people could ever be anything but what the nature of its government made it.”¹¹ Because Rousseau saw politics, instead of religion or custom, as the basis for society, “the character of a people depended on the nature of its government...”¹² As a result, “in ways that Rousseau prophesied but could himself only dimly imagine, government became an instrument for fashioning a people.”¹³ This component of Rousseau’s expression in the French Revolution, Ragsdale suggests, is “a hint of Stalin’s Second Revolution, Russia’s Iron Age.”¹⁴ 2

Since the French Revolution was arguably more top-down than bottom-up, it is appropriate to notice the nature of the monarchy involved. The French monarchy’s demise stemmed from numerous, converging forces: financial strains, political rivalries, parliamentary opposition, and attacks on royal legitimacy stemming from evolving political theory.¹⁵ One clear contrast with the American Revolution is that while the British monarchy had been ceding a growing measure of power to the nobles (and later to Parliament) for centuries, the French political system leading up to the Revolution still “rested...heavily on the king's personal 3

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 329.

¹¹ Ibid., 331.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bossenga, “Origins of the French Revolution,” 1323.

sovereignty.”¹⁶ Even those who note limitations on royal power in France still used descriptive terms like “patrimonial state” because of the king's heavy influence.¹⁷

Indeed, the more absolute nature of royal authority in France created tremendous financial strain. “Participation in the War of American Independence...had left the [French] government heavily indebted [*sic*] and more dependent on the *parlement* of Paris to rubber-stamp new taxes and loans.”¹⁸ Unlike England, however, where “the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had transformed the British government into a trustworthy or ‘credible’ borrower”¹⁹ (because the British Parliament had taken fiscal control), in France “absolute monarchs could repudiate debt,”²⁰ which meant French borrowing came at a much higher price. One outcome of this was that the French credit system failed in 1788, setting off a chain of events that led to the Revolution.²¹

French *Laïcité* -- “Militant” Secularism

One of the most profound contrasts between the French Revolution and the American Revolution is the former’s potent form of secularism. As Bauberot put it, “The French speak willingly of the ‘French exception,’ and it is true that the French system of secularism has peculiar or unique traits.”²² In France, secularism (*laïcité*) is “not simply...a policy choice but...part of its national identity.”²³ Craig Calhoun, sociologist and president of the Berggruen

¹⁶ Ibid., 1301.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1302.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1303.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1306.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 1310.

²² Bauberot, “Secularism and French Religious Liberty,” 451.

²³ Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism,” 35-36.

Institute, defines it uniquely as a “*Catholaïcité*,”²⁴ which, like French identity, has been shaped “not just by general Christian history but by Catholic culture, its struggle against and ascendancy over Protestantism, and then the challenge brought by revolutionary and republican assertions of the primacy of citizenship over devotion.”²⁵

In order to understand how a strange moniker like *Catholaïcité* could evolve, a look at France’s religious history is important.

Historic Repression of the Bible

French history reveals a consistent pattern of Catholic repression of alternative Christian expressions. In the 13th and 14th centuries, not long after the zenith of Roman Catholic power, Pope Innocent III launched the Albigensian Crusade against a religious movement named for the region of Albie in France. While the Catholic Church accused them of heresy, any true evidence of their doctrines is lost to history:

It is exceedingly difficult to form any very precise idea of the Albigensian doctrines because present knowledge of them is derived from their opponents and from the very rare and uninformative Albigensian texts which have come down to us. What is certain is that, above all, they formed an antisacerdotal party in permanent opposition to the Roman church and raised a continued protest against the corruption of the clergy of their time.²⁶

That their survivors joined the Waldensians, a Bible-believing movement, suggests the Albigensians may also have followed a biblical doctrine. The first major battle of the Albigensian Crusade was the Massacre at Béziers, 21-22 July 1209, where as many as 20,000 civilians were slaughtered.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Albigenses,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Albigenses>, accessed Sept 29, 2017.

²⁷ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Massacre at Béziers,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Albigenses>, accessed Sept 29, 2017.

The Huguenots were a largely Calvinist movement that derived from the Reformation. They “generally read the Bible...as authoritative testimony...that is, as history with theological implications.”²⁸ On 24-25 August, 1572, Roman Catholic nobles and other citizens murdered between 5,000 and 30,000 Huguenots in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. By the late 17th century, hundreds of thousands more had fled from persecution in France.²⁹ 1

A third noteworthy movement that took place mostly in France, Jansenism, stressed original sin and the grace of Christ, opposing Jesuit assertions in their Counter-Reformation.³⁰ Others describe them merely in structural terms, as “a dissident movement in the Catholic Church.”³¹ Pope Clement IX officially ended toleration of the movement in 1713,³² however, and Louis XIV outlawed them sometime before the Revolution during Louis XVI’s reign.³³ 2

What becomes clear as a result is that the Roman Catholic Church largely wiped out any traces of the Reformation in France during the centuries leading up to the Revolution. In pre-revolutionary France, then, “Catholicism was the lens through which all religion was viewed at the time.”³⁴ 3

Biblical Criticism in France 4

One apparent side-effect of the Catholic Church’s repression of the Reformation in France (and with it, repression of open use of the Bible) is that biblical criticism gained 5

²⁸ Schwarzbach, “Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason,” 437.

²⁹ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Massacre of St. Bartholomew’s Day,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Albigenses>, accessed Sept 29, 2017.

³⁰ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Jansenism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Albigenses>, accessed Sept 29, 2017.

³¹ Bossenga, “Origins of the French Revolution,” 1302.

³² The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Jansenism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Albigenses>, accessed Sept 29, 2017.

³³ Bossenga, “Origins of the French Revolution,” 1302.

³⁴ Bauberot, “Secularism and French Religious Liberty,” 460.

considerably more traction there. One of Voltaire's (1694-1778) contributions to history was a deeply critical reading of the Bible, which “dissolved” its ethical and religious teachings in “speculations about the editing and transmission of biblical texts....”³⁵ Another notable contributor was Mme du Châtelet (1706-1749), who wrote of her opinion that the Bible was “a very fallible manual.”³⁶ Voltaire's and Mme du Châtelet's appraisal of the Bible derived from the value they placed on “reason” and “rationality,” hallmarks of Enlightenment thought (the “Age of Reason”) that are surprisingly difficult to define consistently.³⁷ While other great Enlightenment thinkers like Newton and Descartes revered the Bible, apologetics, and theology on the one hand, and studies such as mathematics and the natural sciences on the other, they neither read the Bible critically nor applied scientific philosophy to the Bible. They saw the natural and mathematical sciences as deriving from God's creative mind.³⁸ Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet, on the other hand, reversed this approach, seeing God and theology as deriving from the human mind.³⁹

One way of describing this is to say that science--a product of Reformation thought in minds like Newton's and Descartes', gained independence from the Bible. Science and the philosophy of reason, therefore “correlated,” with “corrosive ramifications for the role of the Bible....”⁴⁰ Biblical interpretation “could no longer tolerate conflicts with natural science.”⁴¹ “For Voltaire [and Mme du Châtelet], science represented rational inquiry, while the Bible

³⁵ Schwarzbach, “Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason,” 439.

³⁶ Ibid., 440.

³⁷ Ibid., 441.

³⁸ Ibid., 441-442.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 462.

⁴¹ Ibid., 463.

represented arbitrary and irrational authority.”⁴² In essence, they launched what Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach, a scholar of their collective works, described as “the warfare of Science with theology,”⁴³ or a “war against the Bible.”⁴⁴

French Enlightenment thought on faith and reason contrasted sharply with Colonial American thought. Even Jefferson found much value in biblical morality, but in France, biblical criticism led to a more wholesale rejection of Scripture. Voltaire, for example, embraced Tertullian’s definition of faith, that “to have faith one must ‘annihilate’ one’s reason, because faith and reason are antonymic.”⁴⁵ In keeping with his contemporary, David Hume, Voltaire held reason in such high esteem that “what is reasonable-without contradiction...is believable even when it is not true.”⁴⁶ They not only held the category of “reasonable” to be absolute--not subject to any relative judgments (i.e., what is more or less reasonable)--but they also did not recognize the *subjective* application of reason in any person’s mind. For Mme du Châtelet, “the category of reason admits of no qualifications,” and she asserted she “could not reason about anything unreasonable.”⁴⁷ In fact, they rejected resurrections and miracles as “unreasonable,” “irrational,” or “absurd.”⁴⁸

An extension of this that had clear, ideological implications is that Voltaire and Montesquieu both embraced the idea of “noble savages,” people who were “unencumbered by Christian dogma” who were “every bit as good as their baptized, European counterparts whom they were meant to embarrass. The secularist implications [were] obvious. What is the need for

⁴² Ibid., 464.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 448.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 465.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 455.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 443.

Revelation if better results could be obtained without it?”⁴⁹ Unlike even the more skeptical of America’s revolutionaries (such as Jefferson), Voltaire and his devotees saw fit to seek morality apart from the Bible. 1

It may be difficult to measure the impact these ideas had on French public opinion of the time, but Schwarzbach asserts that based on a “rough sense of the scale of readership” inferred from editions and re-editions of Voltaire’s work, one may infer “quite a few readers in France for the most vigorous if not always the most thoughtful Bible criticism.”⁵⁰ In any case, “[t]oward the end of the [18th] century...the battle against the Bible had been largely won by Mme du Chatelet and her fellow critics.”⁵¹ 2

Anticlericalism 3

In the years leading up to the Revolution, then, not only was there minimal influence from the Bible in French society, but the Catholic religion “was the only one that was legitimate in the old regime.”⁵² Moreover, the nearly absolute power of the monarchy “was closely tied up with religious claims to authority,”⁵³ and French history had seen “a long history of priestly involvement in policies, education, and other dimensions of social life.”⁵⁴ The result was that the Revolution “took up the mantle of secularism”⁵⁵ in a “frontal conflict between what is called 4

⁴⁹ Kennedy, "The Tangled History of Secularism," 34.

⁵⁰ Schwarzbach, "Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason," 444.

⁵¹ Ibid., 469.

⁵² Bauberot, "Secularism and French Religious Liberty," 459.

⁵³ Calhoun, "Rethinking Secularism," 41.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 41.

‘clericalism,’ or the claim of religion to political dominion over the country, and the anticlericalism that actively fought this claim.”⁵⁶ 1

Royal and Catholic persecution of Jansenist priests, which intensified in the 1750s, also had an unintended effect. Jansenists turned to co-religionist jurists for support and succeeded in wresting absolute control of the sacraments from the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁷ What's more, “the [revolutionary] claim that authority inhered in the entire body of the faithful and not in the public person of the pope transferred to the political arena” and contributed to the adoption of Social Contract Theory. The revolutionaries’ refusal to “deify the monarch,” something the Vatican had done consistently, “helped to ‘desacralize’ the French monarchy” and transfer power from the king to the nation's representatives. The final product of wresting church control from the Vatican was “increased control of the state over the church.”⁵⁸ 2

In revolutionary France, then, “*laicite* came about in a struggle *against* a powerful church” (emphases original). In fact, the French Revolution “was the first anti-religious revolution in Europe.”⁵⁹ The extent of the backlash was remarkable: 3

When the French Revolution detonated, a series of acts between 1789 and 1793 secularized both the state and the church. Popular sovereignty replaced divine right, church property was secularized, religious orders were suppressed, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy unilaterally subordinated the church to the state (clergymen were to be elected by the secular electorate, and communications with Rome were forbidden).⁶⁰ 4

Two years later in 1795, a “rather punitive separation of Church and State”⁶¹ ensued. 5

⁵⁶ Bauberot, “Secularism and French Religious Liberty,” 459.

⁵⁷ Bossenga, “Origins of the French Revolution,” 1318.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, “The Tangled History of Secularism,” 35.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

This official separation “sanctioned the termination of clerical salaries” and, while it allowed churches to reopen, tolerated “no public manifestation of cult.”⁶² Officially, “Religion was to be confined to the private domain where, as one of the Ideologues put it, ‘each citizen can indulge in the errors he pleases.’”⁶³

The French revolutionary goal was for the state to have “a morality independent of all religion” and a “moral supremacy” in relation to all religion based on liberty and a “rational theology.”⁶⁴ Therefore, for the French, “*laicite* was all about controlling and managing religion.” They sought to remove religion “from the spaces of the Republic.”⁶⁵ The French revolutionary ideal was not merely secularism, but a more militant form of irreligion.⁶⁶ Even the Reign of Terror did not sufficiently deter anticlericalism. It led to religious (Catholic) revival, but the official separation of Church and State followed in 1795.⁶⁷

Ideology as a Replacement for Religion

The “rational theology” the revolutionaries sought found expression in “ideology,” or the “Science of Man,” which led to today’s social sciences.⁶⁸ In 1796, three years before the French Revolution culminated in the Napoleonic coup, “the physician-philosopher Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis (1757-1808) exhorted his colleagues of the French National Institute to establish the

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 27.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism,” 42.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, “The Tangled History of Secularism,” 35.

⁶⁸ Caroline Hannaway, Review of Canabis: *Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*, *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 4 (October 1981): 854, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

‘science of man and society.’”⁶⁹ He and his peers sought to replace traditional religion with “ideology,” or the “science of ideas.” An “ideologue-physician,” he rose to prominence in the early years of the Revolution due to the combination of his medical philosophy and his political connections.⁷⁰ His philosophy reflected “a unique confluence of medicine, politics, and philosophy in the clear line of thought from the Enlightenment to the French Revolution.”⁷¹ Based on “the Enlightenment philosophy of human perfectibility,”⁷² they sought to take empiricism--Francis Bacon's method of studying the *natural world*--and apply it to *humanity*, to “integrate man into nature and make him the object of science by the rigorous study of his physical-mental qualities.”⁷³ In essence, man became the object not only of scientific study but also scientific *manipulation*, leading to the “exalted mission of human and social regeneration.”⁷⁴

This new “applied science of man” was inconsistent with much of the revolutionary impulse. This stemmed from a tendency towards determinism. Their attempt to produce an “autonomous science of human behavior” led to “psychophysical engineering,” by assuming desirable human behavior could be achieved through “sound psychophysiological habits [that] could modify the state of the brain, the nervous system, and the internal organs.”⁷⁵ With this philosophy, physicians joined legislators in a joint endeavor to “perfect the human species,” though Cabanis hoped the government's role would be limited.⁷⁶ An ideological inconsistency manifested in the inherent clash between such social manipulation and claims to “liberty.” The

⁶⁹ Louis S. Greenbaum, Review of Cabanis: *Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*, *American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 336, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2738355>.

⁷⁰ Hannaway, Review of Canabis: *Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*, 854.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 855.

⁷² Greenbaum, Review of Cabanis: *Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*, 337.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 336-337.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 338.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

pursuit of the twin goals of perfecting society and perfecting its human members forced revolutionaries to seek an elusive “compromise...between freedom and regulation.”⁷⁷ Another inconsistency lay in the inability of their philosophy to explain or motivate the *free will* necessary for any revolutionary endeavor. Insofar as physiological materialism leads to (or derives from) materialistic determinism, it is difficult to explain any line that projects from there to political activism, because in doing so, ideologues presuppose “a will free enough to enact reform.”⁷⁸

Reason as a Replacement for God²

Following a line of thought from Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet to Canabis, the revolutionaries’ solution for the clash between human perfectibility and human liberty appears to have been the philosophically elevated notion of reason. As David Ciavatta of Ryerson University in Toronto notes of Hegel’s account of the Revolution: “That to which the revolution grants *absolute sovereignty*, that which it reveals as *ultimate*, is nothing other than the principle of reason itself. This attempt to let reason alone *rule the world* is part of what makes the revolution so momentous an event...” (emphases mine).⁷⁹ While Jefferson had seen education as desirable for *enfranchising* people, the French saw it as a means of *perfecting* them for society. Not only that, but some in the Revolution even deified the concept:

...[T]he French view school as the perfect institution to teach future citizens to exploit their faculties of reason and to help them exercise freedom of thought. The problem is that people can cease to view reason itself as a simple instrument, enshrining it instead. Indeed, there was a short-lived but authentic cult during the revolution (1793-1794) that actually worshipped the “Goddess of Reason.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Hannaway, Review of Canabis: *Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*, 855.

⁷⁸ Dale K. Van Kley, Review of *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790*, *American Historical Review* (April, 2013): 573.

⁷⁹ Ciavatta, “The Event of Absolute Freedom,” 579.

⁸⁰ Bauberot, “Secularism and French Religious Liberty,” 461.

Faith in the absolute nature of reason became a hallmark of the French Revolution. 1
“...Revolutionary practice was an attempt to institute the *sovereignty of reason*...through the mediation of the agency of rational individuals, and ultimately through mediation of the *universal will of reason*” (emphases mine).⁸¹ It was thought “men’s particular and finite wills,” when educated to practice reason, would naturally lead to a clear “general will of all, insofar as this will is at bottom rational.” Herein lay “the law of the general will,”⁸² a belief in and commitment to an “abstract, universal will.”⁸³ The ideal notion of a “totally rationalized practical environment” necessarily led to the second ideal notion of a “rational agent who is already in possession of all of the universal ‘laws of action’ that are to govern [his or] her every move.”⁸⁴ The only thing necessary for such a “rational agent” was to identify any situation “in terms of its transparent, universal character, plug it into [his or] her store of universal maxims, and the required action [would] be clear....”⁸⁵

Here lies another apparent inconsistency within the French revolutionary philosophy. 2
Such philosophers rejected biblical “irrational” absolutes in the belief they would find an alternative set of absolutes--this one completely “rational” and “natural.” Once this set of “timeless principles” were found, no further argument would be required. The problem was that “there is no such set of timeless principles that can be determined ...by reason alone.”⁸⁶

⁸¹ Ciavatta, “The Event of Absolute Freedom,” 587.

⁸² Ibid., 589.

⁸³ Ibid., 594.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 24.

From “the Year of Our Lord” to “the Year of the Republic” ¹

The day after the National Convention abolished the monarchy and declared a republic,⁸⁷ ² the National Convention passed a resolution “to replace the Gregorian Calendar and its Anno Domini dating system with a series of radical calendar reforms.”⁸⁸ As Emmett Kennedy put it, “The cult of Reason of the Terror sought to rid France of Christianity once and for all.”⁸⁹ Their “revolutionary calendar” removed “all holy and saints’ days, substituting civic commemorations.”⁹⁰ Instead, they aimed “to recognize and memorialize” the French Revolution “as a radical new beginning, most strikingly by making the revolution itself – instead of Christ’s birth – the most foundational orienting point in its dating system.”⁹¹ In effect, they asserted the French Revolution as more pivotal to human history than the birth of Christ. The National Convention made the start of their revolution “the ultimate reference point from the perspective of which the meaning of all human actions and institutions...must from then on be interpreted and evaluated.”⁹²

This “highly decimalized system” was akin to the metric system, dividing each month ³ into three, complete ten-day weeks, each day into ten hours, each hour into one hundred minutes, and each minute into one hundred seconds.⁹³ As a more “rational” calendar, it was intended to further entrench “revolutionary vigilance against the irrational authority of religious and other traditional prejudices.”⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Ciavatta, “The Event of Absolute Freedom,” 580.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Kennedy, “The Tangled History of Secularism,” 32.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ciavatta, “The Event of Absolute Freedom,” 580.

⁹² Ibid., 585.

⁹³ Ibid., 588.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 580.

The revolutionary calendar was a clear expression of faith in the absolute nature of reason¹ and the unquestionable nature of “universal will.” A “core function” of the calendar was to openly assert, “now that the *universal will* of the legislature had entered the scene, [that] all other authorities, all other claims – whether past or future – to determine the ultimate meaning and direction of human affairs, must be resituated on its terms” (emphasis mine).⁹⁵ In essence, they proclaimed “the first day of their radical new narrative of human freedom – was itself *willed by the rational order* of nature itself...” (emphasis mine).⁹⁶

Rousseau’s “Mandatory” Civil Religion²

French revolutionaries advocated a civil religion much as American revolutionaries had³ done a few years before. Unlike the American model, however, which functioned alongside traditional religion and even encouraged its practice, the French model--based on Rousseau’s writings--sought to supplant traditional religion. Rousseau wrote in his *Social Contract* (1762) that “Christianity could not serve as the religion for his republic or any other state honoring the ‘general will,’ because it diverted men's loyalties to another world.”⁹⁷ The civic religion he advocated in place of Christianity “came to life in the Revolution with a panoply of naturalistic festivals.”⁹⁸ For him, “fidelity to the social contract...requires moral education (something like civic education)...,”⁹⁹ which must take the form of his civic religion.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 586.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 589.

⁹⁷ Kennedy, “The Tangled History of Secularism,” 35.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ C.L. Griswold, “Liberty and Compulsory Civil Religion in Rousseau's *Social Contract*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 2 (2015): 292, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login>.

Rousseau's model is a fascinating contradiction in terms. He famously charged, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains,"¹⁰⁰ and he also insisted "on the primacy of liberty,"¹⁰¹ but what he meant by "free" and "in chains" is not readily apparent. As Boston University Professor of Philosophy Charles L. Griswold put it, "Rousseau's theory faces deep difficulties—ultimately about the nature of what it means to be free...."¹⁰² First, because Rousseau saw his civil religion as indispensable to the implementation of the social contract, "his notion of "civil religion" was "non-optional."¹⁰³ Equally famous are his assertions that people are "obligated to conform their wills to their reason," and "shall be forced to be free."¹⁰⁴ What's more, "the 'civil profession of faith' is required by law and backed by the police power of the state."¹⁰⁵ Second, in the spirit of Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet, Rousseau appeared to believe his own word on civil religion was final, for he was "explicit" that they were to be offered "without explanations or commentary."¹⁰⁶ Any reflections or debate over the "dogmas" of his social contract, he surmised, would "undermine belief" and were therefore not permissible.¹⁰⁷ Third, anyone who did not "believe" his dogmas could be banished, and anyone who professed them publicly and then "behave[d] as if he did not believe them" was to be executed.¹⁰⁸

In the end, then, Rousseau insisted on "belief, not just conduct,"¹⁰⁹ and despite his prohibition of religious intolerance, his scheme was severely restrictive of religious belief and

¹⁰⁰ Griswold, "Liberty and Compulsory Civil Religion in Rousseau's Social Contract," 272.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 273.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 286.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 281.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 274.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 275.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 277.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 278.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 274.

practice.¹¹⁰ For Rousseau, uniformity of belief was a necessary precursor to “freedom.” As Griswold put it, “It is easy to see why such a civil religion, because of internal inconsistencies of definition, would come into conflict with its own ‘dogma’ that ‘religious intolerance is not tolerated.’”¹¹¹ In fact, “any [religious] view that claims both to be true and alone to offer salvation is inconsistent with Rousseau’s ‘civil profession.’”¹¹²

Freedom Equals Submission²

For Rousseau, then, the condition one has gained by undergoing the “remarkable change” into the social contract is “civil freedom.” For one to fully exercise free will in the political context, or to participate in the *general will*, “does indeed depend on a particular transformation of the *individual will*. Rousseau is explicit that the transition from the state of nature to the social contract [is] a kind of spiritual transformation.”¹¹³ In fact, “The freedom that is gained in the ‘civil state’ or ‘social contract’ [is] the freedom one is ‘forced’ into if one ‘refuses to obey the general will.’”¹¹⁴ More succinctly, Rousseau defined freedom as “obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself.”¹¹⁵ The opposite, as far as Rousseau was concerned, was “slavery,” which he defined as “impulsion of mere appetite.”¹¹⁶ Liberty was, therefore, a combination of “obedience to the law one has prescribed oneself” and mastery of appetites, including the desire for self-preservation, “such that one is willing to sacrifice one’s life for the state if necessary.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 278.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 274.

¹¹² Ibid., 278.

¹¹³ Ibid., 286.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 287.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 288.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 291.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 292.

Griswold summarized it well: “In sum, Rousseau’s social contract theory holds that naturally equal and free citizens are to mold their private wills to the general will, not to some counterfeit of the general will, and that in doing so they are truly free, and certainly at least as free as they were before.”¹¹⁸

The Great Lawgiver?²

Another interesting ambiguity in Rousseau's philosophy is his ascribing a “sanctity” to his civil religion by means of invoking the “Great Lawgiver,” which appears to be a linguistic attempt to transform God into a naturalistic manifestation of the “general will.” Whether Rousseau intended simply to replace God or rather to appeal to Plato’s *philosopher-king* (or both), Griswold dismissed the idea as a *deus ex machina*¹¹⁹ and charged that Rousseau gave no explanation as to the genesis of this “extraordinary figure.”¹²⁰ Rousseau even appeared to replace the biblical notion of law being written on people’s hearts: “The ‘great Lawgiver attends in secret’ to these,” he said, “and they are inscribed ‘in the hearts of the Citizens.’”¹²¹ Such a Lawgiver (or legislator), according to Rousseau, must be capable of changing human nature.¹²²

Difficulties Establishing Republicanism⁴

Roman Catholic support for the monarchy and suppression of Reformation movements, therefore, led to a powerful backlash against not just the monarchy, but religion as a whole. This, combined with Rousseau’s mandatory model of civil religion meant royal subjects could

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 295.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 291-292.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 284.

¹²¹ Ibid., 276.

¹²² Ibid., 282.

expect to exchange an absolute God for an absolute notion of reason, and royal tyranny for a uniquely republican tyranny. ¹

Ironically, while the push for republicanism and division of power might be expected to protect against tyranny, factors unique to the French Revolution prevented this. For example, a royalist known as Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet predicted and tried to avert the Revolution by advocating social reform with the National Assembly. Notably, however, he did not see hope outside of the crown. In an interesting foreshadow to Karl Marx, “Linguet saw society as divided between the oppressors--the rich and powerful--and the oppressed, including himself.”¹²³ He felt the “tradition of Montesquieu,” who advocated for the division of power, was one of many “tools of the oppressors.”¹²⁴ To protect against such oppressors, he believed “absolute monarchical power must step in” to guarantee the people's rights.¹²⁵ Ultimately, he was tried and guillotined in 1794 as a “partisan of despotism.”¹²⁶ While his efforts clearly failed, it seems possible from his example that the presence of royalists in the National Assembly may have retarded the development of separation and limits of power necessary for a constitutional republic to succeed. This may explain why the Revolution’s answer to monarchism (especially during the Terror) looked more like populism than republicanism. ²

In summary, the French Revolution was built on an almost purely Enlightenment base with a nearly wholesale rejection of the Bible as an authority. With a naturalist, materialist base that appealed to an “absolute” concept of reason and a hypothetically absolute “general will,” ³

¹²³ Frances Acomb, Review of *The Ideas and Careers of Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet: A Study in Eighteenth-Century French Politics*, *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 4 (October 1981): 854, accessed August 27, 2016, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/1860204?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

and with the inherent tension between “liberty” and conformity to the “general will,” it was very difficult for republican values to bear consistent fruit. The inherent conflicts are visible in the Revolution’s tripartite values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In religious terms, *liberty* meant “no one must be forced in the domain of religion,” something akin to “free exercise,”¹²⁷ but as demonstrated above, not just external conformity, but true *belief* in a standard, dogmatic civil religion was mandatory in Rousseau’s model. *Equality* suggested no religious (or irreligious) outlook could be privileged over another,¹²⁸ but again, any religion with absolute claims outside of the civil religion could not truly be tolerated in such a model. Finally, while Professor Emeritus Charles Taylor of McGill University suggests this could be “stretching the point a little,” *fraternity* in religious terms at least implies all spiritual families must be heard, and there should be “harmony and comity” between those of different outlooks to the greatest extent possible.¹²⁹ Once again, however, insofar as Rousseau’s model prevailed, this was impossible. As Taylor noted, “these three goals, of course, can conflict.”¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Taylor, “The Meaning of Secularism,” 23.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4 - Outcomes of the American Revolution ¹

The American Revolution, then, was built on a mixed bag of Reformation and Enlightenment thought, and a significant portion of the latter actually appealed to the former for inspiration. Both Christians and Deists appealed to the Bible for inspiration and support. As a result, not only were the outcomes of the American and French revolutions different but structurally they were very different events. In the American colonies, for example, the British aristocracy had not secured a great deal of status in terms of rank. Rather, the elite grew more as a meritocracy. According to Dr. Leonard J. Hochberg's analysis of Alexis de Tocqueville's work, "the American Revolution was not a great social revolution as was the French, but merely a political revolution," in which the American elite (New England "commercial elite" and Southern slave-owners) were better able to lead because of having no "secured privileges."¹ As this paper will demonstrate further below, this structural difference helped preserve liberty. Based on Tocqueville's observations, Hochberg noted, "whereas the French revolutionaries destroy[ed] the aristocracy and ultimately weaken[ed] liberty, the American political elite, after the revolution, proceed[ed] to found a government in which liberty would be preserved."²

America's "Relative Theological Consensus" ³

Tocqueville further noted a stark contrast between American debates and those in the French National Assembly. He emphasized, "the American Constitutional Convention as a 'novelty in the history of society' because the 'calm' negotiations of the delegates took place

¹ Leonard J. Hochberg, "Reconciling History with Sociology? Strategies of Inquiry in Tocqueville's Democracy in America and The Old Regime and the French Revolution," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 7, no. 1 (March 2007): 45-46, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://jcs.sagepub.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

² Hochberg, "Reconciling History with Sociology? 46.

during a time when even sovereignty had been suspended.”³ Tocqueville also noted American “self-interest” was “enlightened” by an “eternal perspective.” As Hochberg put it, “According to Tocqueville, the doctrine ‘self-interest rightly understood’ suggests to Americans that virtuous acts are conducive primarily to one’s own happiness, utility or ultimate profit – either in this life or ‘to earn the blessings of a future state.’”⁴ As he put it, “[Americans] show with complacency how an enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts them to assist each other, and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the State.”⁵

Tocqueville also noted that the American doctrine of what he described as “self-interest rightly understood” is not sufficient to produce virtue. In acknowledging this, he indicated the existence of another source of virtue. According to Tocqueville: “By itself [this doctrine] ... cannot suffice to make a man virtuous, but it disciplines a number of citizens in habits of regularity, temperance, moderation, foresight, [and] self-command.”⁶

What made such “calm” negotiations possible? What inspired such “enlightened” and even selfless “self-interest”? Tocqueville alluded to it by noting the eternal perspective in “the blessings of a future state,” so one possibility to be explored in the concluding material of this paper is the presence of the Bible as a cultural influence. While France had seen much public debate between theism (the Roman Catholic Church) and atheism (spearheaded by Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet), in the American colonies, debate revolved instead over theism and *deism*. Because of the prevalence of nominal Christian culture, even those who expressed doubts still

³ Ibid., 47.

⁴ Hochberg, “Reconciling History with Sociology?” 34.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 35.

wanted to “remain Christian.”⁷ Moreover, because Christianity was seen as a major source for social contract theory, public debates played out very differently in America, seeking variously to protect and restrain religion, but not eradicate it: 1

In America, the protestant notion of individual moral autonomy led to a culture in which ‘the idealization of private judgment in religion overwhelmed earlier notions of communal authority over theological truths.’ Therefore, public debate centered less on theological differences and more on ‘doctrine and practice.’ Also of note was how ‘the infidel controversies [between Christianity and Deism] transformed religious and civil discourse in early America.’ Christians tended to see deists as ‘subversive threats to a moral and patriotic citizenry,’ while deists feared Christian ‘moral reformers’ as possible ‘portends of tyranny.’⁸ 2

One irony is that such debates with deism, or what Dr. James S. Kabala refers to as “ambient infidelity,”⁹ effectively expanded the “open marketplace” of religions, and “a sturdy cultural boundary [was created] between acceptable and unacceptable religious expression in a largely Protestant culture.”¹⁰ Since only overt infidelity was considered unacceptable, “virtually any set of Christian beliefs or practices could gain the protection of religious liberty, even those that may have seemed radical in earlier periods.”¹¹ In essence, “all forms of Christianity were legally and morally acceptable, because, at least, they were not infidelity.” 3

Implications of the Relative Theological Consensus 4

There were two immediate implications of this relative theological consensus. First, all parties sought restraint, for “both Christians and deists desired to police the boundaries of 5

⁷ Kabala, “Clergymen and Infidels in the American Revolution and Early Republic,” 113-114.

⁸ Eric R. Schlereth, Review of *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States*, *American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (April 2014): p. 518, accessed August 7, 2016, Military & Government Collection, EBSCOhost.

⁹ Kabala, “Clergymen and Infidels in the American Revolution and Early Republic,” 113.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

publically acceptable religious speech and conduct.”¹² Second, neither Christians nor deists (as exemplified by Jefferson) saw humanity in idealistic terms. After all, as mentioned above, for Jefferson a self-evident proposition was not necessarily evident to everyone, but only to those “with sufficient intellectual acuity.”¹³ Therefore, “[w]hatever the admirable features of the philosophical ideas advocated in the [American] Revolutionary era might have been, . . . a faith in all of the people was not one of them.”¹⁴ This is partly in common with the French model, for like the French, Jefferson believed people could be enfranchised through educational improvement. What is different (and will be seen in the next chapter) is that Americans did not see self-evident propositions as composing an “absolute” body of knowledge that could be “absolutely” and homogenously attained through education (what the author of this paper refers to as “epistemological positivism gone wild”). Rather, they expected *debate*, and lots of it.

This played out in a different notion of liberty. “American liberty, in contrast [to the French definition], emphasized the triumph of individual freedom and local government over national destiny.” Recognizing the futility of seeking complete consensus and unanimity, Americans “recognized conflict among citizens as inherent in freedom itself.”¹⁵ In fact, the Bible’s presence in American society helped to restrain liberty in a unique way. James P Byrd, mentioned above in Chapter 2 for having analyzed the frequent use and impact of Scripture in the American Revolution, noted that as ministers carefully addressed passages like Romans 13, where Paul clearly advocates respect for government, they were able to argue “the verses did not

¹² Ibid.

¹³ W. Gerber, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 41, no. 4 (1981): 567, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2107263>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gary, Kates, Review of *Sister Revolutions: French Lightning, American Light*. *Libraries & Culture* 36, no. 3 (2001): 480, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

apply to tyrants who violated preexisting laws, which were the real powers that be.”¹⁶ Because 1
of this analysis, Byrd observed, the same passage became a source of security after the
revolution and served as “a biblical safeguard against unbridled liberty and radical
republicanism.”¹⁷

The relative American theological consensus also played out in a unique understanding of 2
human rights and their foundation in God. Dr. Adam Seligman of Boston University notes “just
how indebted modern ideas of individual rights are to religious principles.”¹⁸ These rights
“spring not from man but from God and Nature.”¹⁹ Put another way, “individual rights in
America were not derived solely from positive law, but had acquired a transcendent justification
unique in the modern world.”²⁰ Freedom of conscience in America “draws its legitimacy from a
set of religious precepts and orientations, decidedly not from the idea of the individual as
autonomous moral actor.”²¹

While this is not uncontested today, the foundation for rights stemmed from the idea that 3
“the individual moral agent is not autonomous but subnomous (that is, under divine
injunctions).”²² From this extends another stark contrast between the American and French
models. In America, there is a clear departure from Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, whereby the state
subsumes all individuals. In its place lies a clear distinction between the state and the individual:

The American bills of rights do not attempt merely to set forth certain principles for the 4
state’s organization, but they seek above all to draw the boundary line between state and

¹⁶ Kabala, “Clergymen and Infidels in the American Revolution and Early Republic,” 112.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Adam B. Seligman, “Secularism, Liberalism and the Problem of Tolerance: the Case of the USA,”
Theoria 115 (2008): 1, accessed July 10, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

individual. According to them the individual is not the possessor of rights through the state, but by his own nature he has inalienable and indefeasible rights.²³ 1

Because of the distinction between the state and the individual, and because of the divine foundation for human rights, *equality* was able to coexist with *liberty*. Tocqueville's pessimistic comparison of the revolutions is revealing. While he saw a “universal history”²⁴ with 4 stages: aristocracy, revolution, democracy, and despotism.²⁵ his model was not quite as deterministic as the later Marxian model (from feudalism to democracy, socialism, and communism).
Nevertheless, it reinforced Tocqueville's belief that progress to democracy would inevitably be followed by despotism, even in America. As Hochberg put it, “he was never entirely able to free his thought of the tension between historical events and more deterministic, philosophical modes of thought.”²⁶ As Hochberg summarized Tocqueville’s belief, “the American experience presents the reader with only a temporary anomaly: the unique joining of liberty with equality in the United States will, according to his predictions, inevitably disintegrate with the emergence of the new despotism.”²⁷ 2

What is telling is that he traveled to America specifically to understand why in America, unlike post-Revolutionary France, “equality coexisted with liberty.”²⁸ Regardless of his belief in the inevitability of despotism, Tocqueville still sought hope in the American model: “[D]espite his own pessimism over the longterm [*sic*] prospects for the preservation of liberty in the United States, he believed the import of American institutions could reverse the trend toward despotic 3

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hochberg, “Reconciling History with Sociology?” 23.

²⁵ Ibid., 27-28.

²⁶ Ibid., 26.

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

²⁸ Ibid., 25.

rule in France.”²⁹ He studied America “in order to identify opinions and institutions supportive of liberty that could be imported into France.”³⁰ In fact, it was on America that “he rest[ed] all his hopes for fending off the age of despotism.”³¹

Tocqueville might have found that one of these “institutions supportive of liberty” in America was the institutional distribution of power in accordance with Montesquieu’s political theory. As Hochberg put it, “In America, the decentralization of administration and local governance permits the citizenry to combine economic self-interest with political participation.”³² Again, while Tocqueville was not optimistic about their continued existence, he noted that in contrast to post-revolutionary France, Jacksonian America had “vibrant local governments, newspapers, and free political associations.”³³

Separation of Church and State

A worthy point of comparison between the American and French revolutions is their divergent interpretations of separation of church and state. There has been great debate over the First Amendment, in which the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause often conflict. “[T]he Establishment Clause and...the Free Exercise Clause...have tended to take on separate and often conflicting lives in American constitutional law.”³⁴ In American history, there has been tension between Jefferson's vision of a “wall of separation between church and

²⁹ Ibid., 26.

³⁰ Ibid., 37.

³¹ Ibid., 34.

³² Ibid., 33.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ R.L. Moore, “Common Principles, Different Histories: Understanding Religious Liberty in the United States and France,” *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 461, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1479244310000168>.

state”³⁵ and James Madison's fight for greater freedom of religious conscience.³⁶ Likewise, there¹ was tension between states that formally sponsored churches³⁷ (prohibitions on the federal government were not applied to the states for some time)³⁸ and prominent figures like Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island, where “everyone’s religious conscience stood on an equal basis.”³⁹

As a result, some scholars like American philosopher Martha Nussbaum are willing to claim “Americans, religious ones and non-religious ones alike, have overcome religious intolerance...and have created an inclusive society.”⁴⁰ Indeed, after struggling to assimilate growing numbers of Irish Catholics in the 19th century, for example, “the Supreme Court laid down an important Constitutional principle [in 1963] that the state could not substantially burden someone’s religious practice without demonstrating a compelling state interest.”⁴¹ Nussbaum goes so far as to assert, “Americans have progressively widened their concept of fairness and have extended legal respect to all religious groups.”⁴² To be sure, “The idea that states should accommodate religious practices within a general framework of uniform law is undeniably stronger in the United States than in Europe.”⁴³²

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 463.

³⁷ Ibid., 474.

³⁸ Ibid., 475.

³⁹ Ibid., 463.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 464.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 466.

⁴³ Ibid.

Church, State, and Schools ¹

Separation of church and state is a prominent doctrine in both America and France, and it ² plays out significantly in both nations' school systems. "Both countries view the legal separation between church and state not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to the higher goal of individual liberty in matters of spirituality and faith."⁴⁴ The means employed in each country, however, "diverge and even conflict."⁴⁵ Even in America, courts have demonstrated their belief in the "need to limit the teachers' coercive influence over students' religious views."⁴⁶ As stated in a Pennsylvania decision, "state education officials have a 'compelling interest in maintaining the appearance of religious neutrality in the public school classroom.'"⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the American model has generally maintained religious expression as ³ equivalent to non-religious expression, even in public school facilities. Especially with regard to groups meeting at school after hours, "the Court has consistently held that religious speech and association must be treated the same as nonreligious speech and association."⁴⁸ Much of this has stemmed not only from the *Free Exercise* clause of the First Amendment but also from the *Free Speech* clause.⁴⁹ Even when attempts to invoke the *Establishment* clause have been made, "the Court [has] rejected this argument as inconsistent with the students' free speech rights under the Equal Access Act."⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Steven G. Gey, "Free Will, Religious Liberty, and a Partial Defense of the French Approach to Religious Expression in Public Schools," *Houston Law Review* 42, no. 1 (2005): 3, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://heinonline.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 22.

American religious liberty derives largely from the restrictions on the government in the First Amendment: “The two religion clauses of the First Amendment implement this understanding in compatible ways. The *Establishment Clause* serves as the explicit structural constraint on the infusion of absolutist religious principles into government” (emphasis mine).⁵¹ It not only prevents an “outright theocracy,” but it also prevents the government from “endorsing or implementing through law any one group's religious precepts.”⁵² The *Free Exercise Clause*, on the other hand, “complements this protection by serving as a check on the coercive use of government power to force the political majority's religious views on an unwilling minority. Along with the other protections of personal expression [i.e., Free Speech] in the First Amendment, the Free Exercise Clause guarantees and protects the existence of a vibrant private sector....”⁵³

Another great distinction of the American system is that “American courts...for the most part have ruled that parents' rights trump the government's authority--and perhaps the rights of their minor children as well.”⁵⁴ Even more than student rights, American courts have protected “rather the right of parents to have their children immersed in a religious exercise chosen by the parents.”⁵⁵ In the U.S., then, barring clearly illegal or harmful activity, “the government is precluded from intervening to protect the child's religious prerogatives from family or community influences.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid., 49.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

Secularization in America ¹

Americans today are sometimes surprised by the overt religiosity of early American culture, and they may be equally surprised by what stimulated the decline of that religiosity: ²

Public schools in the nineteenth century often opened with a reading from the King James Version of the Bible...and used reading texts written by Protestant ministers.... It was the arrival of Catholic immigrants and their demand for a separate school system that tipped the balance toward reserving state aid only for purportedly secular schools. Separation of church and state became the chosen formula for Protestants...to [avoid encouraging] the growth and spread of Roman Catholicism...[by denying] tax money to benefit church-run schools.⁵⁷ ³

Indeed, defending the rights of religious minorities was problematic for maintaining a “biblical consensus” in society. It led naturally to the “downplay of the role of religion in public institutions.”⁵⁸ ⁴

Americans may have struggled to assimilate the influx of Catholics in the 19th century, but it is important to remember “that nineteenth-century Catholicism, as pronounced in Rome, was not friendly to democratic republics. Not everything said against Catholic pronouncements was ill-informed prejudice.”⁵⁹ Indeed, “papal conservatism in the nineteenth century...turned Catholicism into an unyielding opponent of liberalism..., nationalism, and secular Constitutional principles.”⁶⁰ Near the end of the 19th century, “Pope Leo XIII, who paid attention to the United States as a possibly strong influence upon France, issued an encyclical in 1899 warning Europe to resist the attraction of the heresy of ‘americanism.’”⁶¹ Still, a mercy in American history is ⁵

⁵⁷ Moore, “Common Principles, Different Histories, 468-469.

⁵⁸ Harvey Sarles, “The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life,” *On the Horizon* 12, no. 2 (2004): 71, accessed August 7, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

⁵⁹ Moore, “Common Principles, Different Histories, 470.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 470-471.

⁶¹ Ibid., 472.

that “Vatican policies in the nineteenth century never came close to posing threats to American national identity.”⁶² 1

Other forces contributed to the steady decline of religiosity in 19th century America. Dr. Christian Smith, a sociologist at the University of Notre Dame, notes the “intellectually thin character” of mainstream Protestantism at the time, a religion that emphasized “populist common sense, subjective experience, and mass-based emotional revivalism” and that failed “to develop a defensible theological approach to knowledge and society that could withstand the attacks of elite challengers...”⁶³ From 1857 until the early 1870s, even the NEA “supported the teaching of a ‘common Christianity,’ including devotional Bible reading in all public schools.”⁶⁴ New NEA leadership began to contest this through the 19th century, though, and by the 1890s and 1900s “the contest was settled.”⁶⁵ 2

Another force behind America’s secularization was a uniquely philosophical approach to science. Scientific practice at the time of the American Revolution followed the methods of Francis Bacon. Baconian science sought “to accumulate facts through refined observation . . . taking care not to speculate about what was not actually observable, and to avoid preconceived notions.” Rejecting the idea of hypotheses, “the laws discovered by induction were understood teleologically as descriptions of the mediate intervention of the divine in the world.”⁶⁶ In the years to follow, “[a] positivist attack on Baconian science advanced a modern science of society 3

⁶² Ibid., 471.

⁶³ Sarles, “The Secular Revolution,” 67.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 69.

that would provide knowledge for a secular and progressive order.”⁶⁷ This positivist attack came from authors like Spencer, Darwin, and Huxley, with their “gospel of naturalism.”⁶⁸

The field of psychology is also revealing of the “intellectually thin” nature of 19th century Protestantism:

This speaks to something particular or peculiar to Americans. Protestantism emphasized personal experience – first as the personal surrender of a believer to God. But this emphasis ‘changed during the nineteenth century from salvation in a future kingdom to a cathartic shedding of emotional burdens in service of the kingdom within.’⁶⁹

In essence, salvation gave way to “self-realization.”⁷⁰

A notable difference between American and French histories is that this trend toward secularism came much later in the U.S., and it has yet to gain as much traction as it ever did in France.

Economic Growth

America’s high levels of individual liberty have borne fruit economically. A study published in the *Journal of Institutional Economics* demonstrated that “movements toward higher levels of civil liberty are associated with higher economic growth rates.”⁷¹ Their study, which focused on economies from 1850 to 2010, showed a “long-run association” between the two concepts.⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁷¹ Javier Alfonso-Gil, Maricruz Lacalle-Calderon, and Rocio Sanchez-Mangas, “Civil Liberty and Economic Growth in the World: A Long-Run Perspective, 1850-2010, *Journal of Institutional Economics* 10, no. 3 (2014): 427, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048>.

⁷² Ibid., 428.

Modern economic growth, as we know it, began in the latter half of the 18th century with the changes brought about by the American and French revolutions.⁷³ Before then, economics was dominated by the “Malthusian equilibrium,” also known as the “Malthusian trap,” whereby “[a]ny output growth led to a corresponding population increase that stifled any positive result in the GDP per capita, thus maintaining well-being at a subsistence level.”⁷⁴ Beginning in the 18th century, however, “increases in output were not only greater, but the appropriation of the surplus began to be shared by a larger proportion of the population, breaking with the inertia of the past.”⁷⁵ In short, the middle class began to grow economically as a direct result of increased enfranchisement out of the revolutions. The end of the old economic model became known as the “Malthusian rupture.”⁷⁶

Two forms of liberty have been involved. The first, “civil liberty,” which one study refers to as “negative liberty,” is “the individual right to make decisions within a given vital space without interference.” The second, “positive liberty,” is “the right of each individual to choose their representative in a democratic society or to run for election to any public post in the community.”⁷⁷ It is the “negative liberty” where we see the greatest divergence between the two nations. According to the study, the greater the consolidation of civil liberties, the greater the consolidation of economic growth and development.⁷⁸ Those places “most inclined toward liberty” also eventually have a “greater accumulation of ideas,” which generates “increasing

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 429.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 430-431.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 432.

returns for society,”⁷⁹ including “growth and greater levels of well-being.”⁸⁰ Alternatively, “the resistance to ideas will bring about losses in productivity in those territories that limit the reception of new ideas.”⁸¹ In summary, the greater the civil liberties, the greater the economic growth. What’s more, “escaping from the low level of civil liberty leads to more significant gains in growth than moving from the medium to the high liberty level.”⁸²

America’s high levels of civil liberties have led to significant economic growth throughout its history, despite occasional setbacks. While France has had two centuries to adjust course economically, the comparative long-term effects of both nations’ revolutionary philosophies may be seen in that by 2014, France’s GDP, when adjusted for cost (purchasing power parity = PPP), and when compared to each individual state in the U.S., ranked lower than 48 of them.⁸³ At \$38,847, it ranked above only Idaho and Mississippi.⁸⁴ Admittedly, there are many other factors contributing to this measure, but based on the cited study, it is still a likely indicator of relative strength of civil liberties.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 433, 434.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 445.

⁸¹ Ibid., 434.

⁸² Ibid., 446.

⁸³ Mark J. Perry, “US GDP Per Capita by State vs. European Countries and Japan, Korea, Mexico and China and Some Lessons for the Donald,” *AEIdeas* (blog), March 6, 2016, <https://www.aei.org/publication/us-gdp-per-capita-by-state-vs-european-countries-and-japan-korea-mexico-and-china-and-some-lessons-for-the-donald/>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5 - Outcomes of the French Revolution ¹

The French Revolution played out very differently than its American predecessor. ² British commentary on the French Revolution was scathing. An early 19th-century article in *Edinburgh Magazine* described post-revolutionary France as “a country where anarchy prevails and despotism is predominant; where cruelty rear its head and liberty is known only by name...where the dictates of reason and sound policy are smothered by the flood of popular opinion.”¹ The article continued:

Have we not seen religion abolished by the authority of the Legislature, its ministers forced to emigrated to a distant shore, and Nature and Reason substituted in the room of Deity? Have we not seen morality, not that which is the offspring of utility, expediency or the fitness of things, but that which is eternal, immutable, and unalterable as the will of Deity, enduring the same fate, and enshrined in the same tomb? Have we not seen the sacred banners of liberty unfurled at the foot of the guillotine, and trampled under the feet of the executioner...? At the recollection of what has there happened, who, O gracious Heaven! can withhold a sympathetic tear?² ³

What could have led to such a condemnation? How did the ideologies behind the French ⁴ Revolution play out during and after the event? Tocqueville’s “classic” observations are a good place to start. He tended to focus more on structural issues than ideological. He noted, for example, the tensions between not only the monarchy and the aristocracy, (the former both disenfranchised and privileged the latter), and between the aristocracy and the “Third Estate,”³ some of whom were increasingly literate.⁴ He argued that “in France the subversion of feudalism by the centralizing monarchy and by the economic avarice of the nobility had proceeded further than anywhere else in Europe.”⁵ As a result, both the monarchy and the

¹ D. B., “On the Effects of the French Revolution upon Science and Philosophy,” *The Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany* 10, no. 1800 (1785-1803): 287, accessed August 27, 2016.

² Ibid., 288.

³ Hochberg, “Reconciling History with Sociology?” 43.

⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁵ Ibid., 40.

nobility were unable (or unwilling) to lead or help the Third Estate, and the latter completely supplanted the former. Perhaps this transition did not need to be violent, but Rousseau's philosophies held too much sway.

Rousseau and Government of Reason

There can be little doubt of Rousseau's influence. A less critical analyst of the French Revolution once noted, "Napoleon said to one of his generals that he wished that [Rousseau] would have never been born; the general inquired why he said so, to which Napoleon replied that he is the man who has paved the way for Revolution."⁶

Rousseau was never able to reconcile his political rationalism and the absolute nature of the "general will" with the popular sovereignty he also espoused. Bryan Garsten of Yale University noted:

This was a point that dogged Rousseau in book 3 of the *Social Contract*, where he distinguished between sovereignty and government. The reason for that distinction was that the legitimacy of the sovereign general will depended on its generality, a generality that would be compromised as soon as one adopted particular policies that affected different people differently. For Constant, this meant that Rousseau's understanding of popular sovereignty was virtually useless, for it could not be enacted without being corrupted.⁷

Because of the French focus on Rousseau with little attention to Locke or Montesquieu, what on the surface looked like French representative republicanism was actually very different. "France's Enlightenment heritage is quite different from English [or American] liberalism. In France, the struggle against arbitrary rule or the protection of freedoms was accomplished by

⁶ S.H. Channar, "Societal Change and the French Revolution," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 59, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 98, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/890489520?accountid=12085>.

⁷ Bryan Garsten, Review of *Behind the Nostalgia for Ancient Liberty: Giovanni Paoletti Benjamin Constant et les Anciens: Politique, Religion, Histoire*, *European Journal of Political Theory* 8, no. 3 (2009): 407, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://ept.sagepub.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/content/8/3/401>.

paying tribute to the Government of Reason, not by establishing representative procedures.”⁸

Part of the problem lay in the inherent contradiction between the absolute nature of the “Cult of

Reason” on the one hand and the more “liberal” notion of “Tribute to the Will” on the other.⁹

What they sought instead was “a good rational authority based on science.”¹⁰ Politics thus

became “an art of observation and a science of deduction.”¹¹

French revolutionaries thought this possible because of their faith in the absolute nature

of what could be apprehended in politics through human reason. Rosanvallon quoted 19th

century historian *Docteur Quesnay* who said, “Men and their governments make no laws at

all.... Instead, [t]hey recognize laws as consonant with the Supreme Reason which governs the

universe.”¹² Rosanvallon quotes another 19th-century French historian who asserted, “We do not

split into parties when we watch a game of chess, nor when we read two different solutions to a

[the] same geometry problem.”¹³

The French thought that through reason, men could attain absolute unity of opinion and

purpose. In order to destroy the old political divisions, then, “there was fierce competition to

make unity the cardinal value.”¹⁴ The French found themselves in the unenviable position of

being able to *participate* but not *debate*. “French liberty followed Rousseau in emphasizing

democratic rights to participation but minimized dissent and individual expression...[obsessed]

with finding consensus and unanimity.”¹⁵ 20th-century historian James Livesey asserted,

⁸ Pierre Rosanvallon, “Political Rationalism and Democracy in France in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” *Philosophy Social Criticism* 28, no. 6 (November 2002): 687, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://psc.sagepub.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/content/28/6/687.full.pdf+html>.

⁹ Ibid., 688.

¹⁰ Ibid., 687.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 688.

¹³ Ibid., 692.

¹⁴ Ibid., 693.

¹⁵ Kates, Review of *Sister Revolutions: French Lightning, American Light*, 480.

“revolutionary republicans were inherently committed to the elimination of any plurality, any assertion of particularity.”¹⁶ In his dissertation, G.C. Walton argued that “the culture of calumny, combined with lingering notions of the sacredness of authority, made political pluralism and tolerance of dissent difficult to establish.”¹⁷ Indeed, with God and the Bible largely absent in this society, both *reason* and the *nation* became sacred. Scholars like Emmet Kennedy¹⁸ and French historian Pierre Rosanvallon¹⁹ refer to the Cult of Reason, while David A Bell observes what he calls the Cult of the Nation, employing “religious language and concepts” to convey “a transfer of sacrality from the monarch to the nation.”²⁰

Will vs. Reason; Rousseau vs. Montesquieu

With such a philosophy, political power could not be distributed evenly. The first group they failed to enfranchise (or keep enfranchised) was the nobility, who were given no voice at all in the new government. Instead, they were forced to “conform to the laws of the Third Estate.”²¹ Furthermore, for the vast majority—even of the Third Estate--the right to vote was nothing more than “a social status, that of the individual member of a people collectively taking the place of the king.”²² Individual voices were drowned out by the all-subsuming notion of “general will,” which became “the principal black box of the revolutionary process.”²³ The result was that

¹⁶ James Livesey, “The Limits of Terror: the French Revolution, Rights and Democratic Transition,” *Thesis Eleven* 97, no. 1 (May 2009), 77, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://the.sagepub.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/content/97/1/64.full.pdf+html>.

¹⁷ Heuer, “Liberty and Death”, 190.

¹⁸ Kennedy, “The Tangled History of Secularism,” 35.

¹⁹ Pierre Rosanvallon, “Political Rationalism and Democracy in France in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” *Philosophy Social Criticism* 28, no. 6 (November 2002): 688.

²⁰ Heuer, “Liberty and Death”, 189.

²¹ Rosanvallon, “Political Rationalism and Democracy in France in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” 693.

²² *Ibid.*, 694.

²³ *Ibid.*, 695.

instead of government “by the people,” by a philosophical twist, citizens of the nation became enslaved to their own power. “All the ambiguity is here: in 1789, no one yet dreamed of founding an authority entrusted to the people. The nation was the sovereign subject.”²⁴ As another put it, the ambiguity of “general will” made it possible “to mask the contract formed between the Government of Reason and the sovereignty of the people.”²⁵ Even before the Terror, the two-tiered voting system essentially established and preserved a new elite to replace the old one.²⁶

The Cult of Reason also implied naturally that checks and balances were not only unnecessary, but they were also counterproductive. For the French, there was a “latent hostility to Montesquieu” and his ideas of separation of power, which they regarded as “‘gothic’ principles for fighting absolutism.”²⁷ “In this state of necessary disorder, the idea of establishing counterweights to prevent the arbitrary abuses of the sovereign power is obviously fanciful: the opposite of arbitrariness is evidence.”²⁸ 18th-century historian Le Mercier observed, “Evidence must be the very principle of authority because it is tantamount to the uniting of wills.”²⁹ This is “the principle of unanimity, the form of universal reason.”³⁰ The rationalizing “law state” therefore became an expression of the “Cult of the Law.”³¹

This attitude was apparent in the French attitude towards the American post-revolutionary efforts at government. “Enlightenment thinkers supported American

²⁴ Ibid., 695.

²⁵ Ibid., 696.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 690.

²⁸ Ibid., 689.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

emancipation, even while they quickly distanced themselves from the American constitutional endeavor, which they found too marked by the spirit of English common law and the balance of powers,”³² and which they saw as weakened by the “arbitrariness” of parliamentary debate and legislation.³³ All this led Rosanvallon to note, “French democracy is not founded on a deconstruction of absolutism. On the contrary, it consists of a reappropriation of it.”³⁴

How Equality Prevented Liberty²

Previous analysis has shown how the Bible was largely removed from French society. Tocqueville's analysis also indirectly betrays the absence of biblical restraint among the French populace. “For Tocqueville, ‘the love of wealth ... either as a principal or accessory motive’ permeates all of the classes in democratic society.”³⁵ In his analysis of French culture, Tocqueville makes no mention of the “hope for a future state” as he did in America. Instead, pervasive themes in the Revolution consistently included “the perfectibility of human nature, national identity, and the nature of citizenship.”³⁶

As a result, stark differences with the American model stemmed from “the issue of autonomous versus subnomous conceptions of personhood”³⁷ mentioned above. Human rights derived not from human dignity as God’s creations, but rather from a rational, utilitarian measure:

Article I of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (August 26, 1789) of the French National Assembly states: 'All men are born and remain free and equal in rights: social distinctions can not [sic] be found but on common utility'. This is a total

³² Ibid., 691.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 695.

³⁵ Hochberg, “Reconciling History with Sociology?” 33.

³⁶ Heuer, “Liberty and Death”, 192.

³⁷ Seligman, “Secularism, Liberalism and the Problem of Tolerance,” 3.

reconfiguration of the meaning of identity along the lines of utility functions rather than what may be termed constituted selves.³⁸

Building on a “rational” foundation for human rights, the French sought a very different notion of liberty. After the Jacobins gained power in 1789 and instituted the Terror of 1793-1794, they developed what early 18th-century historian Benjamin Constant described as a romanticized, “ancient” view of liberty, which unlike the republican model sought “the active participation of all citizens in self-government,”³⁹ hypothetically modeled after the ancient Greek example. In effect, they tried to include all citizens directly in government, but as noted above, the two-tiered voting system meant this was a thin façade. In a lecture in 1819, Benjamin Constant struggled to explain “why the Jacobins and their followers – and not only they – were so easily attracted to such an anachronistic vision of political liberty.”⁴⁰ He asked a telling question: “Could it be true that the principal threat to freedom in the period after the French Revolution was neither the seizure of power by a tyrant nor the application of force by an army, but instead citizens’ over-zealous attachment to a certain form of liberty?”⁴¹ His appraisal of the Jacobins was generous, for he said: “otherwise well-intentioned men caused infinite evils during our long and stormy revolution.”⁴² He justified their actions by positing that “among people who have experienced long periods of oppression and subjection, as the French had,” there is a strong “longing for beautiful actions,” which they sought from the ancients.⁴³ Constant’s observations are noteworthy in light of the paucity of biblical influence in French society. The French sought

³⁸ Ibid., 3.

³⁹ Garsten, Review of *Behind the Nostalgia for Ancient Liberty*, 401.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 402.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 403.

⁴³ Ibid.

ancient “beautiful actions” not in biblical history, but rather in Golden-Age Greece. The Jacobins, Constant said, subscribed to an “illusion” when they “posited that unlimited popular sovereignty was legitimate,” and also when they “accepted the separation between the public sphere and the private lives of individuals, thus tacitly condoning the social injustice of the old regime.”⁴⁴ When combined with their passionate pursuit of unanimity, the result of universal enfranchisement was “majority tyranny.”⁴⁵

The absolute nature of Reason and the resulting artificiality of equality transformed the notion of freedom. For the French revolutionaries, “to be free [one has] only to observe the laws of nature and conform to them.”⁴⁶ Rosanvallon summarized 18th-century political historian Le Mercier de la Rivière who put it this way: “A liberty, in other words, is in conforming to nature, while oppression comes only from a wayward human will.”⁴⁷ Freedom was not self-determination, but rather subjection of will to the absolute nature of reason. Indeed, this “led to the exhalation of the abstract individual, free from all determinacy, [a] simple member of the social All.”⁴⁸

As mentioned above, for the French, human equality necessarily meant unanimity. Even as early as 1750, Tocqueville claimed, the French “were unenthusiastic in their regard for liberty as compared with their passionate desire for equality.”⁴⁹ To achieve this unanimous equality, they were forced to consolidate power. Tocqueville said the French were committed to the idea that “centralization must increase,”⁵⁰ and in the process of their “radical” changes, they

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 404.

⁴⁶ Rosanvallon, “Political Rationalism and Democracy in France in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” 689.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 693.

⁴⁹ Hochberg, “Reconciling History with Sociology?” 41.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

effectively “swept away” many of the conditions necessary for the preservation of freedom.⁵¹

French historians often refer to the “Jacobin impulse in French political culture,” otherwise branded “the political culture of generality,” a hostility towards intermediary bodies in favor of an extreme form of individual liberty, along with a “deep attraction to a tutelary state that aimed to remake individuals into worthy citizens.”⁵² This is sometimes referred to as the “Revolutionary cult of generality,” a yearning for *le grand tout* and “the centralizing impulse as the requirement of modern administration.”⁵³

Tocqueville's analysis is revealing. As mentioned previously, he traveled to the U.S. to discover why both equality and liberty could coexist there, while in France, “equality threatened to undermine liberty.”⁵⁴ In fact, his experiences with the French Revolution were so bad that he developed his “universal history of the deleterious influence of equality on political liberty,”⁵⁵ becoming “extremely pessimistic regarding the long-term consequences of democracy.”⁵⁶ He believed that “even in America despotic rule would eventually triumph.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² C.B. Welch, Review of Pierre Rosanvallon's, *The Demands of Liberty: Civil Society in France Since the Revolution. French Politics, Culture and Society* 27, no. 1 (2009): 121, accessed August 20, 2016, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA202253147&sid=summon&v=2.1&u=vic_liberty&it=r&p=ITOF&sw=w&asid=5b2a9da563c0329769d06cf70fb9e1ad.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Hochberg, “Reconciling History with Sociology?” 25.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 28.

The National Assembly & the Failure of Democracy ¹

With only a rational, utilitarian notion of humanity and morality, unrestrained violence ² marked the Revolution from the beginning. Years before the Terror officially began, this was already apparent in the “grisly spectacle of the crowd enthusiastically encouraging a pastry cook named Desnot to hack De Launey, the governor of the Bastille, to pieces on the corner of the Place de Grève.”⁵⁸ In fact, the sacred nature of the “general will” also led later to the extrajudicial execution of the king. “Saint-Just demanded that the King not be tried but simply executed as a rebel, outside the social contract that would give him any legal protection,”⁵⁹ lest the king wind up being the one “trying the People themselves.”⁶⁰

By the time the National Assembly replaced the Estates General, they were set up for ³ failure. Edmond Burke, an Englishman who famously predicted as early as 1790 “the unraveling and collapse of the whole French government,”⁶¹ based his conclusion largely on an analysis of the National Assembly. One problem, he ironically noted, was that so many “commoners” had been swept into power (“there [were] not quite fifty persons possessed of an income amounting to 100£ sterling yearly”)⁶² that they were vulnerable to financial corruption. As political theorist William Selinger notes, Burke asserted the National Assembly “was far too formally powerful and unchecked, the number of profit-seeking actors gaming to take advantage of it far too numerous, and its leaders far too inexperienced.”⁶³ Selinger further describes his position:

The colossal political power of the National Assembly meant opportunity, according to ⁴ Burke, for anyone with economic ambition. The whole rising French middle class saw

⁵⁸ Livesey, “The Limits of Terror: the French Revolution, Rights and Democratic Transition,” 70.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ William Selinger, “Patronage and Revolution: Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France and His Theory of Legislative Corruption,” *The Review of Politics* 76, no. 1 (Winter, 2014): 62, accessed August 7, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1492333071?accountid=12085>.

⁶² Ibid., 60.

⁶³ Ibid., 61.

possibilities, both political and pecuniary, in the emerging political order that the National Assembly was crafting...a landscape of corrupt (and potentially corrupt) actors....⁶⁴ 1

Burke's analysis was remarkable. Despite the absolute power of the National Assembly, their financial self-interest meant its members were collectively unable to stand against the “moneyed interest”⁶⁵ (financial elite) of the nation, as demonstrated by their confiscation of church lands to pay the nation's debt--rather than merely declaring debts of the former “illegitimate” regime void.⁶⁶ What's more, their attack on the monarchy demonstrated they could not overcome their “dependence on impoverished lower classes.”⁶⁷ The result, Burke said, was “a National Assembly which on the one hand has acquired the entirety of legislative sovereignty, as well as deep control over judicial and executive functions,” but was essentially “impotent.”⁶⁸ Burke's prediction of the National Assembly's demise was remarkable. As Selinger summarizes, “Caught between rival powers, the National Assembly will ultimately be forced to draw on the army. But the Assembly will no more be able to ensure the army's loyalty than anyone else's. Burke foresaw that the Revolution would end in a military coup.”⁶⁹ 2

Rousseau's philosophy, combined with the structural and [ir]religious issues in French society, doomed the National Assembly to failure. As a result, despite the “moderate accomplishments of the Constituent Assembly” during the early years of the French Revolution 3

⁶⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 65.

(1789-92),⁷⁰ by the time of the radical period of the Terror (1793-94),⁷¹ it could be confidently¹ observed that “French democracy failed during the 1790s.”⁷²

The Terror²

Rousseau’s irreconcilable philosophical forces of Reason and Will eventually collided³ during the Jacobin Republic of 1793-1794, “the most repressive and violent moment of the Revolution.”⁷³ The Jacobin Terror (which began in 1793 and culminated in June and July 1794) was particularly noted for “systematic, state-sponsored violence, and an apparatus of trials and executions decreed by a government in power.”⁷⁴ The irony was clear: “The violence of the Jacobin Terror is of a relatively small scale compared to later horrors; its brutality comes not from sheer numbers but from its context. How could a movement that proclaimed universal human rights kill in the name of those rights?”⁷⁵

At the same time, the Terror was inevitable. By this time, “the discourse of will, which⁴ was identified with Rousseau’s theory of popular sovereignty, triumphed and pointed the revolutionaries in the direction of the Terror.”⁷⁶ Dr. Jennifer Heuer of the University of Massachusetts Amherst notes an “increasing inability of revolutionaries to use their analytical frameworks to predict or explain events.”⁷⁷ “[The] sense of growing anarchy contributed to the

⁷⁰ Kates, Review of *Sister Revolutions: French Lightning, American Light*, 481.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 480.

⁷³ Selinger, “Patronage and Revolution,” 65.

⁷⁴ Heuer, “Liberty and Death,” 180.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Bossenga, “Origins of the French Revolution,” 1315.

⁷⁷ Heuer, “Liberty and Death,” 179.

breakdown of collective identities and controls on violence.”⁷⁸ The result was that political divisions “became matters of life and death.”⁷⁹

Problems lay in the “religious” belief that reason leads necessarily to universals, as well as in utilitarian concepts of humanity and morality. Furet, noted in the previous chapter as a 20th-century revisionist and anti-totalitarian scholar, noted that in the Revolution, “each individual could arrogate to himself what had been a divine monopoly.... If he then found obstacles standing in his way, he attributed them to the perversity of adverse wills rather than to the opacity of things; the Terror’s sole purpose was to do away with those adversaries.”⁸⁰

Another problem lay in the society’s rejection of religious restraint. “The Terror occurred when imagination, in the sense of the ability to reinterpret basic norms of public life, was neither constrained by society nor by culture and was instead actively controlled by fear.”⁸¹ The lack of restraint had clear origins, as the more “irreligious” elements of the Enlightenment “set the tone for the French Revolution during the Terror’s ‘de-Christianization’ phase in 1793 and again in 1797-1799.”⁸² In this phase, there was a “‘philosophic’ intolerance of even the pro-revolutionary Catholic clergy”⁸³ It is also commonly held that “a certain illiberal interpretation of Rousseau’s political thought set the tone of the Robespierrian or ‘great’ Terror.”⁸⁴

In the series of counterrevolutions over the following years, it became clear that human life was no longer sacred. As identities and sides shifted, “Labeling enemies often involved

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 188.

⁸⁰ Livesey, “The Limits of Terror: the French Revolution, Rights and Democratic Transition,” 66.

⁸¹ Livesey, “The Limits of Terror,” 77.

⁸² Dale K. Van Kley, Review of *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790*. *American Historical Review* (April, 2013): 573.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

dehumanizing them, a mechanism that made it easier to reconcile the rights of man with state-sponsored violence.”⁸⁵

Thermidor, Directory, and Empire ²

Eventually, even the Terror turned on those who first instigated it with the Thermidorian Reaction and the 5-member governing Directory, which together “eliminated the revolutionary vanguard that had come to stand for nothing other than the charisma of revolution and allowed a new renegotiation of the treaty, ending the cycle of contention between different partners.”⁸⁶ Beginning in 1797, this series of upheavals--repeated attempts to “make the republic work”⁸⁷--eventually undid the republic altogether. In 1797, a coup targeted “royal machinations.”⁸⁸ The next year, another coup purged “neo-Jacobins” and “ostensibly saved the republic, [but] ultimately crippled it by delegitimizing it.”⁸⁹ In 1799, after what some describe as another rise of new Jacobins, the year ended with the culmination of a gradual and subtle “Brumaire coup” in which Napoleon rose to power and consolidated “liberal authoritarianism.”⁹⁰

The immediate result was that the French people, “exhausted by revolution” and the violence of the Terror, found in Napoleon a “legitimate despotic government,”⁹¹ a “plebiscitary dictatorship.”⁹² After this, Napoleon demonstrated “his famed ability to connect with ordinary people and his understanding of new forms of warfare”⁹³ and arguably became the first leader to

⁸⁵ Heuer, “Liberty and Death,” 183.

⁸⁶ Livesey, “The Limits of Terror,” 78.

⁸⁷ Heuer, “Liberty and Death,” 184.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 186.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Garsten, Review of *Behind the Nostalgia for Ancient Liberty*, 405.

⁹² Ibid., 404.

⁹³ Heuer, “Liberty and Death,” 187.

wield populism and nationalism as juggernaut forces. In 1804 he was finally crowned as emperor.⁹⁴ Herein lay the greatest irony of the French Revolution. France famously “proclaim[ed] a republic and an end to royalty for all time, only to embrace an Emperor a few years later.”⁹⁵

For Cabanis, the French physician-philosopher who sought to establish “the science of man and society,” Napoleon’s consolidation of power was:

the fulfillment of the physiological assumptions of the science of man: the timeless body-politic metaphor of government as a living mechanism whose organs achieved an equilibrium in which all systems worked for a common purpose. The constitution was an empirically developed product of historical change. Government was an agency of human perfectibility to satisfy physical and moral needs, encourage the exercise of human faculties, safeguard liberty, direct laws and good habits, and restrain harmful passions.⁹⁶

Series of Governments

Cabanis’ dreams were not to be realized. Beginning with Napoleon, one legacy of the French Revolution was “France’s extensive involvement in every general European war of the eighteenth century and its largely unsuccessful military and economic competition with Britain, Prussia, and Austria.”⁹⁷ Napoleon’s bellicose nature led to further political upheavals. After the First Republic, weakened by the Terror, dissolved into the First Empire of Napoleon, the Second Republic eventually dissolved into the Second Empire of his nephew.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 175-176.

⁹⁶ Greenbaum, Review of Cabanis: *Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*, 339.

⁹⁷ David Wilsford, “The ‘Conjoncture’ of Ideas and Interests: A Note on Explanations of the French Revolution,” *Comparative Political Studies* 18, no. 3 (Oct 1, 1985): 366, accessed July 6, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1295912628?accountid=12085>.

The Third Republic, which came nearly a century after the Revolution, was according to Furet “the ultimate victory of Republicans over monarchists.”⁹⁸ In it, he believed, the Revolutionary promise of 1789 – democracy and human rights – was largely fulfilled.⁹⁹ Other appraisals are more somber. According to Rosanvallon, the Third Republic’s democratic achievements were “moderate,” including “French democracy’s belated appropriation of the pluralist impulses of civil society.”¹⁰⁰ The Third Republic sought to replace “illiberal Jacobin democracy” with “balanced democracy,” but due to its inherent instability, Rosanvallon dismisses as a “flawed achievement.”¹⁰¹

Whatever successes the Third Republic might have brought, many historians do not see it as the end of the Revolutionary era, because “[t]he hour of its birth was also the 1880s, when socialism and communism began their meteoric rise in Europe”¹⁰² Indeed, “Lenin portrayed himself as the new Robespierre, and the Bolsheviks as the new Jacobins.”¹⁰³ In the 20th century, there was widespread support from the French Left for the 1917 Revolution in Russia.¹⁰⁴ As Furet put it, “the heritage of Jacobinism filtered down through Russian populism,” and yet Lenin would add “science” to the political equation, as a more complete “substitute for religion that was so sorely lacking in late eighteenth-century France.”¹⁰⁵

The Third Republic fell to the Nazis, and the post-WWII Fourth Republic collapsed in 1958, leading to today's Fifth Republic. Remarkably, while reviewing a book by Rosanvallon,

⁹⁸ Daniel Schönplflug, Daniel, “Histoires Croisées: François Furet, Ernst Nolte and a Comparative History of Totalitarian Movements,” *European History Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (April 2007): 274, accessed July 9, 2016. <http://ehq.sagepub.com.ezproxy.liberty>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Welch, Review of Pierre Rosanvallon’s, *The Demands of Liberty*, 121.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Schönplflug, Daniel, “Histoires Croisées,” 274.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 274-275.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 277.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 275.

Harvard University's Cheryl B. Welch notes that not until the 1970s was there a true "repudiation of totalitarianism" in French political culture.¹⁰⁶ Even well into the Fifth Republic, the legacy of Rousseau and the Jacobins led to a "new alignment with socialism, because of its utopian aspirations," the youth revolt of 1968, and the Socialist Party's taking power in 1981 with their slogan, "change life" a slogan that later "became subsumed by harsh realities of governance."¹⁰⁷

Furet's writings indicate his opinion, too, that despite the Third Republic's successes, "the Revolution may even have lasted into the 1970s."¹⁰⁸ Historians note "exceptional weakness in French development: a tradition of centralization and the permanent illiberal temptation stemming from the absolutization of popular sovereignty and the state's claim to institute and instruct society."¹⁰⁹

A Pattern of Centralization ³

The legacy of the French Revolution was centralization of power and even a heavy tendency towards totalitarianism. Tocqueville, who did not live to see the Third Republic, insisted "the primary consequence of the Revolution was the continuity and intensification of bureaucratic centralization."¹¹⁰ Initially, they expanded the state in response to "wretched and miserable conditions of a newly working class...[through] redistribution of wealth and property."¹¹¹ An unintended consequence of each counter-revolution was "the strengthening of

¹⁰⁶ Welch, Review of Pierre Rosanvallon's, *The Demands of Liberty*, 122.

¹⁰⁷ Bauberot, "Secularism and French Religious Liberty," 461-462.

¹⁰⁸ Schönplflug, Daniel, "Histoires Croisées," 274.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Hochberg, "Reconciling History with Sociology?" 45.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 35-36.

the demand for a state to enforce equality.”¹¹² Ultimately, instead of “the realization of freedom,”¹ they found “the imposition of despotic rule under Napoleon.”¹¹³ Tocqueville warned that “despotic” government “occurs gradually, almost insensibly, as administrators in democratic ages seek to limit the economic uncertainty experienced by an entire category of citizens, the workers. In the end, despotic government serves the population by providing for its welfare.”¹¹⁴ Tocqueville’s was a prescient warning for the years following his death.

20th-century revisionist explanations of the Revolution’s outcomes are also telling. For them, the “elimination of representative institutions through political centralization” combined with the “Rousseauvian belief” in both “direct democracy” and “general will,” in the end “could not allow the free expression of political differences.”¹¹⁵ The late Steven G. Gey, known for his advocacy of separation of church and state, put it more bluntly: “Even in its most benign applications the French position contains the seeds of a distinctly antiliberal statism.”¹¹⁶

François Furet, the revisionist historian who left the French communist party in 1956 and later challenged Marxist interpretations of the Revolution,¹¹⁷ saw Jacobinism as forming the origins of the “totalitarian age,”¹¹⁸ insofar as any such movement typically “takes power by means of enforced political conformity, terror and a willingness to commit mass murder.”¹¹⁹ To him, Jacobinism began as a “liberation movement” that was “initially attractive because of its

¹¹² Ibid., 35.

¹¹³ Ibid., 45.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁵ Heuer, “Liberty and Death,” 181.

¹¹⁶ Gey, “Free Will, Religious Liberty, and a Partial Defense of the French Approach to Religious Expression in Public Schools,” 5.

¹¹⁷ Schönplflug, Daniel, “Histoires Croisées,” 269.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 268.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 267.

notions of freedom of harmony”¹²⁰ but transformed into a “party of terror,”¹²¹ a “force behind repression and violence.”¹²² Furet noted that Jacobinism’s “universalist notion of harmony,” despite its aims at “creating harmony in a new society,” led instead to “rigid distinctions between friend and foe.” Then later when its “orthodoxy” changed rapidly, it “brooked no opposition” and sought “restoration of internal unity through purges.”¹²³

For Furet, herein lay the “mental foundations” of totalitarianism: “the absolute will to change, the utopian promise of the future, a Manichean worldview, the readiness to commit violence stemming from these premises and the symbolic pseudo-participation of the people in politics.”¹²⁴ Revisionist scholar David Bell, in what James Livesey describes as an example of “revisionist rewriting of the French Revolution around the Terror,”¹²⁵ goes further, seeing in the Terror the original inspiration for modern-day terrorism:

Before ‘Global Terrorism’ and ‘the war on terrorism’ there was the Terror: the radical climax of the French Revolution, set to the grisly music of the guillotine. Its architects and executioners were the first people widely called ‘terrorists’, and the first to be widely known for embracing fear as their principal political weapon. For nearly two centuries, their actions stained the political imagination of the West as little else has.¹²⁶

Even in the 19th century, Hegel focused on “how the revolutionaries’ efforts to institute a radically new conception of human freedom – absolute freedom – were essentially self-undermining,” because their own principles forced them “to turn on themselves and to destroy the very institutions of freedom that they themselves created.”¹²⁷ For him, “the revolution sought

¹²⁰ Ibid., 271.

¹²¹ Ibid., 270.

¹²² Ibid., 271.

¹²³ Ibid., 270.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 271.

¹²⁵ Livesey, “The Limits of Terror: the French Revolution, Rights and Democratic Transition,” 67.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ciavatta, “The Event of Absolute Freedom,” 579.

to realize something that was, in principle, unrealizable.”¹²⁸ David Ciavatta, a scholar who studied Hegel’s observations, noted the slippery slope into authoritarianism, for “such a law can maintain its force only on the condition that some citizens and not others – some sort of policing agents, for example – are designated as its enforcers.”¹²⁹ How, when, and where to apply this law will then “always be a matter of particular judgments that ultimately rest on their individual shoulders.”¹³⁰ Another expression of this authoritarian tendency has been to limit freedom of speech. The “famed universalism” of the Revolution made suspect any group that attempted to mediate between the individual and the state, and “freedom of expression (article 11 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man of Citizen in 1789) often gave way to new forms of censorship, including restrictions on the press.”¹³¹ As Dr. Jennifer Heuer put it, “Even champions of human rights for oppressed minorities often imagined a regenerated and increasingly uniform nation.”¹³²

Continued Distrust of Religion ²

The revolutionary backlash against Roman Catholic power, particularly in the absence of Reformation or biblical influence, led to a continued distrust of religion in post-revolutionary France. “French *laïcité* really did more than separate church and state. It served to institutionalize state suspicion of religious activity as potentially harmful to the interests of the nation.”¹³³ This distrust of religion reinforced centralization of power. Tocqueville did a remarkable job explaining how without God, a citizen must turn elsewhere for help:

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 596.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Heuer, “Liberty and Death”, 188.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Moore, “Common Principles, Different Histories, 461.

His independence fills him with self-reliance and pride amongst his equals; his debility makes him feel from time to time the want of some outward assistance, which he cannot expect from any of them, because they are all impotent and unsympathizing. In this predicament, he naturally turns his eyes to that imposing power [the state]...until he ultimately views it as the sole and necessary support of his own weakness.¹³⁴ 1

In the end, Tocqueville warned, the “age of despotism” is marked by “the fulfillment of the citizens’ desire for economic certainty by a welfare state,” for they see the government as “the sole agent and the only arbiter of [their] happiness.”¹³⁵ 2

Part of the irreligious impulse was a response to Roman Catholic power. In his 1819 discourse, Constant distinguished between “sacerdotal religions” (those that “empowered a priestly caste”) and alternatives.¹³⁶ While he associated sacerdotal religions with “repressive societies,” instead of associating the alternative with biblical, Reformation churches, he saw an ideal in the “‘independent’ religiosity of the Greeks.”¹³⁷ 3

He held a materialistic view of religion as a whole. For him, “religious sentiment was essentially a longing for transcendence,”¹³⁸ and yet that longing led people “to give up their freedom to priests claiming to represent the voice of God.”¹³⁹ For Constant, “religious sentiments cannot be eliminated from the human psyche, and yet they are dangerous when allowed into politics.” He proposed that people should “satisfy or indulge these sentiments without ceding power to outside authorities,” to find “a form of spirituality or religiosity that is more supportive of autonomy than traditional religions, less prone to being used as a tool in our oppression.”¹⁴⁰ In 4

¹³⁴ Hochberg, “Reconciling History with Sociology?” 36.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 36-37.

¹³⁶ Garsten, Review of *Behind the Nostalgia for Ancient Liberty*, 408.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 409.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 409-410.

the spirit of the ancient Greek model of polytheism, he proposed “an especially tolerant, romanticized and anti-doctrinal sort of Protestantism” to fulfill the “political and psychological functions... important to liberal society.”¹⁴¹ Such a model, he believed, “both indulges our need for illusions and helps us to resist their worst effects.”¹⁴² Some have referred to Constant’s 1819 discourse as “post-post-revolutionary” because of its “overemphasis on rationality and self-interest that had emerged as one response to the Terror.”¹⁴³

This is not to say there were no powerful religious impulses in French history. The Reign of Terror led to religious (Catholic) revival, but the official separation of Church and State followed in 1795.¹⁴⁴ A few years later, the 1801 Concordat between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII “restored to the Church many of the privileges it had enjoyed under the *ancien régime*.”¹⁴⁵ When Napoleon fell, the Bourbon Restoration from 1814-1830 also saw the Catholic Church regaining much power and influence.

These gains were temporary, though, because the French by this time had largely internalized the Enlightenment conviction that religion, “with its claims of exclusivity and a historical tendency to use power to enforce those claims, has in its very nature something that poses a danger to liberty of conscience.”¹⁴⁶ The resulting “divorce between public and private religious regimes” congealed into “an anticlerical secularism” that took nearly final form in the Third Republic (1870-1940) and was written into law with the official Separation of Church and State of 1905.¹⁴⁷ The 1905 law was considered a protection against the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 410.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 404.

¹⁴⁴ Kennedy, "The Tangled History of Secularism," 35.

¹⁴⁵ Moore, "Common Principles, Different Histories," 471.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 470.

¹⁴⁷ Kennedy, "The Tangled History of Secularism," 35.

“In France, the law of 9 December 1905 that separated churches from the state overturned centuries of Catholic privilege within French borders.”¹⁴⁸ 1

By 1905, then, religious practice became severely restricted. After passage of the law, “Religious practice was free only within a narrowly defined concept of religious worship and ritual.”¹⁴⁹ As a result, “separation of church and state in France did not prove to be the boon to religion that it was in the early American republic.”¹⁵⁰ Martha Nussbaum goes so far as to describe this as “the French tradition of 'coercive assimilation.’”¹⁵¹ R. Lawrence Moore of Cornell University notes while critiquing Nussbaum’s work, “Even secular liberals in the United States...would probably agree...that the American tradition of ‘separation of church and state’ is more protective than French *laïcité* of each person’s space for both belief and religious practice.”¹⁵² 2

Church, State, & School 3

For the French, official secularization and public schools arrived simultaneously. Moore summarizes it well: 4

The French, in laws adopted in 1881 and 1882, before the 1905 law, set up secular public schools that were intended to take from the Catholic Church its monopoly control over French education. The same series of laws that ended religious instruction in the state schools also dissolved the Jesuits, abolished chaplains in the French military, and removed nuns from their role in hospitals.¹⁵³ 5

¹⁴⁸ Moore, “Common Principles, Different Histories, 471.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 472.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 459.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 473.

The French approach to school derives directly from Rousseau's ideas. "For Enlightenment thinkers, schooling, along with freedom of the press, was the principal vector for the diffusion of Reason."¹⁵⁴ This point underscores "the state's task of public education."¹⁵⁵ As Le Mercier observed, "A government must be the principal teacher of its subjects."¹⁵⁶ More than training people for technical development, the state has "the goal of training rational men and citizens."¹⁵⁷ Indeed the state "is conceived as a pedagogue, as society's teacher."¹⁵⁸ In essence, "educational activity [is] the condition by which the general will can be made rational."¹⁵⁹

Because the state's pedagogic role is tied to Rousseau's faith in the absolute nature of what can be apprehended through reason, the state further concentrated power in the educational system. Like in America, the French seek to maximize individual liberty in matters of education. While America protects religious groups and parents' rights, though, the French "identify religious liberty as a right adhering to individuals rather than to communities."¹⁶⁰ Professor Jeremy Gunn notes, "Whereas 'religious freedom' in the United States typically bears the nuance of freedom of religion from the state, in France *laïcité* often bears the connotation of the state protecting citizens from the excesses of religion."¹⁶¹

The result is that France has consistently sought to render their educational system completely devoid of religion. "In France, the government is seeking to create a limited area in which especially vulnerable students are free to consider all ideas and possibilities, temporarily

¹⁵⁴ Rosanvallon, "Political Rationalism and Democracy in France in the 18th and 19th Centuries," 692.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 698.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Gey, "Free Will, Religious Liberty, and a Partial Defense of the French Approach to Religious Expression in Public Schools," 6.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 62-63.

free from the constraints imposed on them by the religious and social mandates of their community and family...[in effect, to create] a ‘religious coercion free zone.’”¹⁶² This leads to what one analyst calls a “somewhat paradoxical regulatory framework: only by prohibiting each student from manifesting a particular religious stance can the government provide the conditions in which the student can exercise the freedom to decide whether or not to adopt that religious stance in the first place.”¹⁶³

Steven G. Gey summarizes the French position on religion and education with five points: 1) religious liberty is “an individual rather than a group phenomenon,” 2) public education seeks “to introduce students to a world of ideas and experiences to which the students may not have access in their home or community environment--even if that exposure potentially undercuts the students’ religious training,” 3) religious liberty of students is clearly distinguished from that of their parents, 4) public education is responsible for protecting students--even young children--from “the subtly coercive group dynamics of religious communities,” and 5) separation of church and state means the government is a strictly secular domain, which means “to preserve the structure of religious liberty for everyone, religion must be consigned to the private sector.”¹⁶⁴

Modern Challenges³

In today’s Fifth Republic, France has struggled to cope with three forces: globalization⁴ (and a resultant loss of sovereignty), consumerism, and immigration.¹⁶⁵ The French have not

¹⁶² Ibid., 62.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 78.

¹⁶⁵ Bauberot, “Secularism and French Religious Liberty,” 463.

been prepared for multiculturalism. Indeed, “French public opinion is strikingly negative towards the discourse of globalization, identifying it with liberalism run amuck.”¹⁶⁶ Because the French system “is much more centralized, and its experience with religious diversity much more circumscribed,”¹⁶⁷ for most of its history, “policies of *laïcité* were easier to standardize than any American jurist’s version of church-state separation.”¹⁶⁸ This changed with heavy 20th-century immigration from Algeria, which has posed a tremendous challenge to reconcile public good with religious rights (such as to wear the hijab).¹⁶⁹ Britain’s “left-wing daily,” *The Guardian*, once declared that the 20th century decline of Christianity in France, and Europe as a whole,

only reinforced the French liberal tradition’s sense of its own superiority and historical inevitability; the assumption was that wealth and time would between them kill off the last vestiges of religious faith. But this has not proved true of France’s Muslims, and now, disastrously, liberalism has resorted to the full force of the law to buttress its supremacy.¹⁷⁰

Today there are between four and five million Muslims in France,¹⁷¹ roughly 10 percent of the population, and their presence “has changed the nature of the debate about *laïcité*, and not just with respect to Islam.”¹⁷²

Partly in response to frequent gang-rape of Muslim girls by Muslim boys in their own neighborhoods (so common they were referred to as “pass-arounds”),¹⁷³ France passed a law in 2004 banning the wearing of the hijab in French schools. Their much-debated solution was to

¹⁶⁶ Welch, Review of Pierre Rosanvallon’s, *The Demands of Liberty*, 120.

¹⁶⁷ Moore, “Common Principles, Different Histories, 475.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Welch, Review of Pierre Rosanvallon’s, *The Demands of Liberty*, 120.

¹⁷⁰ Gey, “Free Will, Religious Liberty, and a Partial Defense of the French Approach to Religious Expression in Public Schools,” 8.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷² Moore, “Common Principles, Different Histories, 477.

¹⁷³ Gey, “Free Will, Religious Liberty, and a Partial Defense of the French Approach to Religious Expression in Public Schools,” 15.

continue to assume “individual free choice [in this case, the girls’ right to decide not to wear the hijab] should always be favored over the preservation of a community's religious purity.”¹⁷⁴ In effect, the only way to protect Muslim girls’ religious rights was to prevent them from expressing it in school. Despite France’s hope that this would protect Muslim girls, response to the law outside of France was generally negative.

Another challenge has been women’s rights. France’s treatment of women may be said to have turned out well. Dr. Jennifer Heuer, who wrote on the subject of the family during the Revolution, noted that many new civil laws were created for women in the early years, though the 1790s saw much erosion of women’s opportunities.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, 1793 was a turning point “after which women were definitely excluded from political participation.”¹⁷⁶ During the Jacobin Republic, even as the regime limited women’s political power, however, “it reinforced their civil rights.”¹⁷⁷ French women got the right to vote only a few decades after American women did.

Finally, with respect to economic performance, capitalism came late for France. As mentioned above, in the French Revolution, “Both the middle class and the peasantry were hostile to incipient capitalism, as was much of the legislation of the revolution itself.”¹⁷⁸ As a result, “the revolution was ‘a triumph for the conservative, propertied, land-owning classes, large and small’ and contributed to the economic backwardness of nineteenth-century France.”¹⁷⁹ France’s 20th-century socialism may have contributed to their ranking below 48 individual American states in economic performance, another point mentioned above.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷⁵ Heuer, “Liberty and Death”, 185.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 191.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 192.

¹⁷⁸ Ragsdale, “Comparative Historiography of the Social History of Revolutions,” 329.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 328.

CHAPTER 6 - Analysis ¹

The research shows that the ideological underpinnings of the American and French Revolutions were vastly different. The ideology behind the American Revolution was a combination of biblical Reformation thought and Enlightenment thought in a cultural milieu rich with biblical influence. The ideology behind the French Revolution, on the other hand, was a much purer form of Enlightenment thought that included a nearly wholesale rejection of the Bible. As noted in the previous two chapters, the outcomes for both nations were equally different. This has led James Livesey to conclude “the relationship between the French Revolution and the history of democracy, which had once seemed so vital, is now highly contested.”¹

This is not to assert ideological determinism.² After all, the “precise causal significance of ideas” in events like these revolutions is an “intriguing problem.”³ Still, ideas do matter. David Wilsford of *Université de Paris* and University of California, San Diego has posited that structural explanations are insufficient. Instead, he proposes that ideas serve as a critical “intervening variable” between the realities that precede a revolution and the event itself.⁴ Mary Nolan, professor of history at New York University, notes the impact of particular *ideas* in revolutionary France: “By the mid-1790s, the French who still supported the revolution were shaping and being shaped by the ideas debated in the sections and clubs, by the symbolism and vision of the revolutionary celebrations, and by...iconography....”⁵

¹ Livesey, “The Limits of Terror: the French Revolution, Rights and Democratic Transition,” 64.

² Ibid.

³ Greene, Review of *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, 169.

⁴ Wilsford, “The ‘Conjoncture’ of Ideas and Interests,” 358.

⁵ Mary Nolan, “Ideology, Mobilization, and Comparison: Explaining Violence in The Furies,” *French Historical Studies* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 555.

1
Instead of ideological determinism, then, the author of this paper concludes there are certainly “ideological propensities.” There can be little doubt that a major factor in the widely divergent outcomes of the American and French Revolutions is the ubiquitous presence of the Bible in pre-revolutionary American society, as well as in the centuries that have followed, and its near absence in French society. As Chaya Halberstam asserts, “‘biblical religion’ serves in many ways as a precursor to, and a source of, our own democratic and egalitarian ideals.”⁶ If this is true, the corollary may also be true: that the absence of the Bible retarded democratic development in France. The French experiment all too often led not to what Tocqueville described in America as “democracy to the profit of its citizens,” but rather it led to “democratic pathology: despotism.”⁷

2
Modernity has been in conflict with the biblical worldview since the Renaissance, and certainly since the Counter-Reformation and Enlightenment. Mary Nolan, professor of history at New York University, identifies a commonality in states with “high modernist schemes,” a term she borrows from political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott.⁸ “These states, which have come in communist, fascist, *and democratic variants*, share a set of assumptions about knowledge, progress, science, and society that can be harnessed to a variety of different ideological projects” (emphasis mine).⁹ What's more, in their modernist nature, these states “greatly increase the possibility that violence will be considered legitimate and necessary, even progressive.”¹⁰ She continues:

3
These assumptions and commitments can produce distinctly modern forms of violence that are rationally planned and executed and then legitimated, in terms of both the

⁶ Chaya Halberstam, “Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought,” *Biblical Interpretation* 18, no. 4/5 (October 2010), 422.

⁷ Wilsford, “The ‘Conjuncture’ of Ideas and Interests,” 358.

⁸ Nolan, “Ideology, Mobilization, and Comparison,” 553.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

ideologies to which they are linked and the values of science, productivism, and rationalization. These are forms of violence for which vengeance and religion do not provide a satisfactory explanation, for this is the dark side of modernity that is rooted in modernity, not in the persistence of Old Regime beliefs, elites, and institutions.¹¹

The justification of violence that stemmed from these modernist ideas also extended into imperial exercise: “In the name of science, market rationality, productivism, and progress, they have imposed expert knowledge over local knowledge in their efforts to reshape nature and society along modernist lines.”¹² The results of modernist imperialism have also often been violent.

It is important to note that these comparisons are specifically for institutional violence, not personal violence, as exemplified by the Terror and later by the Stalinist purges and the Fascist Holocaust, all events deriving from modernist ideals. While the numbers related to the Terror are comparatively small, the ideological propensity of modernism for institutional violence is clear.

Not only were ideas important, but also matters of character related to divergent ideas of moral subordination to God or complete individual moral autonomy. Edmund Burke, the Englishman who predicted the failure of the French Revolution, concluded the solution to the corruption that led the National Assembly to failure “was to cultivate the character and judgment of Members and voters, rather than [merely] to open up the House of Commons to more popular involvement.”¹³ Research in the previous chapter already made it clear that Rousseau’s antibiblical foundation led to illiberal consolidation of power. Edmund Burke’s analysis implies

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 554.

¹³ Selinger, “Patronage and Revolution,” 46.

it also left the National Assembly vulnerable to corruption. This combination led to a nearly complete loss of liberty in post-Revolutionary France. ¹

Not only are political and civil liberties at risk under a modernist worldview, but even scientific progress. John Oswalt of Asbury Theological Seminary asserted that the Enlightenment attempt to divorce logic and science from the metaphysical foundation of biblical thought—the attempt to make logic and science “stand on their own”—has left science “defenseless against the old gods.”¹⁴ As a result, logic and science have begun to destroy themselves, and humanity has begun a retreat to the pursuit of survival, dominance, comfort, and pleasure.¹⁵ Where logic and science fall short, it follows that economic performance will likewise founder. While a causal relationship is difficult to establish with certainty, there is an apparent correlation between America’s and France’s respective views of the Bible and their divergent economic performance. ²

The implications are that the more the Bible prevails in a society, the greater the propensity to establish and maintain civil and political liberties, freedom from institutional violence, scientific progress, and economic prosperity, ³

¹⁴ John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 28.

¹⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 7 - Conclusions ¹

Pre-revolutionary American society was rich with Scriptural influence, a “biblically literate society” that was the product of the First and Second Great Awakening. The greatest theological conflict lay between Protestant Christianity and Deism, and both sought to live within a “Christian society.” James Byrd also demonstrated that colonial ministers employed the Bible extensively for support in the revolutionary effort, though certainly not without controversy. Finally, while American revolutionaries doubtless drew heavily from Enlightenment thought, they also drew heavily from Reformation thought, and even much of the former was Reformation thought distilled into secular form. ²

Because of this relative theological consensus, the outcome of the American Revolution was an “open marketplace of religion” where its practice was encouraged. Tocqueville noted Americans’ “enlightened self-interest,” which led to cooperation and public participation. The American notion of liberty meant they expected controversy and dispute, and they engineered a political system to accommodate it. Human rights were secured because of their sacred nature and man’s morally subordinate position under Divine authority, and as Tocqueville noted, equality coexisted with liberty. Even with America’s secularization, which came much later than in France, in America’s public schools, the rights of the state have deferred to those of religious groups, and courts have protected parents’ rights to shape their children’s religious upbringing. The United States has also seen unparalleled economic growth and strength throughout its history. ³

In pre-revolutionary France, however, the Roman Catholic Church not only suppressed Reformation thought but also secured significant power and influence, tying itself inextricably to the French monarchy. This led not only to a backlash against Catholic power but also against the ⁴

Bible itself in the decades leading up to the Revolution. Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet did much ¹ to reverse the approach to science, seeing it not as the product of God's mind but instead seeing God as the product of man's mind. They, along with Rousseau, replaced the absolute God with a faith in the absolute nature of Reason and what could be apprehended through its practice. Cabanis replaced religion with "scientific" ideology.

The results were severe anticlericalism and a complete divorce between the public sphere ² and the private practice of religion, a militant form of *laïcité*. The Cult of Reason led people to expect and pursue unanimity as legislators sought simply to "recognize laws as consonant with the Supreme Reason which governs the universe."¹⁶ As Reason came into conflict with Will, the Cult of the Nation and the morally autonomous individual transformed liberty into conformity with Reason. In an ironic twist, conforming to Nature became liberty, while any wayward expression of free will became oppression. Instead of separation of power, the French result was consolidation of power in the National Assembly, the Directorate, and finally Napoleon. Instead of political stability, France has seen frequent and violent political upheavals as the nation swerved between failed attempts at republicanism and periods of empire or restored monarchy.

The French pattern of centralization has played out economically with delayed capitalism ³ and a recent tendency towards socialism, and France has been outpaced economically by 48 of the 50 United States. Centralization has also played out in French schools, where individual rights are favored so much over those of religious groups or parents that in order to preserve individual religious liberty, French schools cannot permit overt individual practice of it.

While the American Revolution gave birth to modern republican democracy, scholars no ⁴ longer view the French Revolution as an obvious part of the birth of modern democracy. The

¹⁶ Rosanvallon, "Political Rationalism and Democracy in France in the 18th and 19th Centuries," 688.

clearest variable in this comparison is the ubiquity of the Bible in pre-revolutionary American society and its near absence in pre-revolutionary France. Analysis in the previous chapter suggested a direct ideological line between “biblical religion” and “democratic or egalitarian ideals.”¹⁷ Likewise, it suggested a direct line between modernism and both “democratic pathology: despotism”¹⁸ and the institutional violence of the Terror. Additionally, there is an apparent correlation between America’s and France’s respective views of the Bible and their divergent economic performance.

The research indicates the greatest hope any nation has for creating and enjoying political liberties, civil liberties, freedom of religion, freedom from institutional violence, scientific progress, and economic prosperity is to permit and encourage the reading and application of the Bible, allowing it to transform society from within.

¹⁷ Chaya Halberstam, “Created Equal,” 422.

¹⁸ Wilsford, “The ‘Conjoncture’ of Ideas and Interests,” 358.

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