The Enemy Within

Culture Wars and Political Identity in Novels of the French Third Republic

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IN THE YEARS 1880–1882, Jules Ferry, then minister of public education and president of the Council of Ministers (akin to prime minister),¹ presented a series of laws to the French parliament designed to establish a system of universal primary education that would, according to the political slogans of the ruling party, be “obligatory, free and laic.” At the same time, he vigorously defended the bill introduced by his close collaborator, Camille Sée, instituting a nationwide network of public secondary schools for girls. With these actions he raised a firestorm of controversy pitting Catholics against proponents of lay education that would embroil the nation for the ensuing thirty-five years. Culminating in the Dreyfus Affair, which divided the country into two warring camps, roughly from 1897 to 1900, and in the official separation of Church and State in 1905, the internal strife lasted until the beginning of World War I, and the effects of these educational reforms are still felt even today (see Chatin, “France Is My Mother” 129).

The linchpin of the curriculum in the new schools was to be its course in “moral and civic education,” designed to replace the classes in “moral and religious education” of the Catholic schools. The new system was to be universal not only in the sense of being obligatory for all children but also, and more importantly, in that of being grounded in the principle of universality asserted in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, issued in 1789 and incorporated into the
Constitution of the First French Republic. Branding Catholicism as just one religion among several in France, Ferry and his Opportunist colleagues sought to unify the nation and justify the secularization of the schools under the banner of an “independent morality” allegedly common to all peoples of all times. When inculcated into the children of France, this morality, consistent with the positivist notion of a universally human social sense at the basis of morality, or with the Enlightenment conception of a universal human subject whose personhood resides in the dignity of a rational being capable of moral action and thus of governing himself, and in either case independent of any particular set of beliefs or dogmas, would serve to form true and loyal citizens of the Third Republic, worthy of participating in the self-government made possible by universal suffrage.

From the start, the Catholic opposition argued that a school without God must be a school against God, that is, a breeding ground of vice and iniquity that would destroy national character and unity. In subsequent years, both the nationalist right and the anarchist left asserted that, by ignoring or overriding particulars of history, region, and race, republican universalism eliminated the creative spontaneity of history, the uniqueness of different cultures and individuals, and true human freedom. The abstract Enlightenment subject, they claimed, was nothing but an “empty simulacrum, a philosophical marionette” easily tyrannized by the centralized powers of Jacobin government (Taine, Révolution jacobine 9). The education the Republic proffered to its peasant and working classes led to the creation of a mass of déclassés, people who had lost all sense of their prior identities and who could not find a home among the upper classes either. In short, the new identity of the republican citizen, the enemies of the Republic alleged, signified in fact the destruction of both individual and national identity.

The same disputes between the universal and the particular have often resurfaced in both politics and education until today. Since the Langevin-Wallon report in 1947, professors of education on the left have argued that democratic schooling should balance universality, providing equal opportunity for all pupils, and particularity, developing each child’s individual aptitudes to the fullest, in order to serve both the collective good and individual happiness. While endorsing these principles, later educators such as Louis Legrand, Antoine Prost, and Philippe Meirieu have contrasted the increasing democratization of admission to the secondary schools with the ever-growing abstraction, formalism, and theoretical bent of the subjects taught, not only in math and science but in the social sciences and humanities as well. Like their university
counterparts, they target the prevalence of universalizing abstract reason as a major source of the crisis in the schools, for technocratic education gives exclusive preference to the “abstract intelligence” that many immigrant and working-class pupils lack, and it ignores the education in multicultural values they believe would fulfill the socializing task of today’s schools.

Critics of the center right counter that universalism is the essential characteristic of French schooling, and that it is actually the ideology of the left that supports the technological mentality in the schools that both sides profess to fear and deplore. In the 1980s, Jean-Claude Milner reasserted the main claim of the Ferry schools: that they alone shape the identity of French children into the true republican citizens of the future by providing universal access to the knowledge that guarantees civil rights in a country with neither the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution nor the principle of habeas corpus in Britain. Expanding Milner’s argument at the start of the new millennium, Denis Kambouchner constructed the problem as a quarrel between the “schools-that-teach [content, knowledge]” and the “techno-pedagogues” of the left, who worry about principles and methods at the expense of subject matter. He contrasts Condorcet’s universal humanism with the ‘German Romantic’ particularism of ethnicity, in order to argue that attention to the multicultural backgrounds of the pupils will inevitably detract from the cause of national unity it is supposed to support.

Criticism of higher education has followed a similar pattern. The modern French university system was created at the turn of the twentieth century and modeled on the German system initiated by Wilhelm von Humboldt in Berlin at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The idea of the University, as scholars are fond of calling it, is the Enlightenment ideal of the independent, disinterested practice of universal reason with the aim of producing objective research and individual development (Bildung).

Social critics such as Pierre Bourdieu have argued that the universalism of the university is an illusion; in reality, it represents the values and interests of the bourgeoisie of a particular period in history, and therefore excludes, or at least dooms to failure, the majority of farmers and working-class students (Reproduction). Jacques Derrida points out that the rights asserted by the Declaration of the Rights of Man are not in fact ‘natural’ and therefore not universal, but are performed by the declaration itself, in a particular language and in a particular historical and social context. As a result, the university can never actually attain the autonomy of its Idea; there will always be a tension between the
University and the State (*Right to Philosophy* I). Jacques Lacan sees the universalizing Discourse of the University as a mask hiding and serving the domination of the Discourse of the Master—that is, as a means of control rather than a path to liberation (*The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*). And François Lyotard, referring to Ludwig Wittgenstein, argues that there is no metalanguage, and therefore no possibility of a universal reason that could, in all cases, adjudicate disagreements among competing claims; there is only a multiplicity of heterogeneous, incommensurable, and therefore irreconcilable language games. As a result, the rug has been swept out from under the foundations of modern educational systems—emancipation of the people through learning in the French tradition (*Postmodern Condition*).

Attacks against the universalism of bourgeois republicanism similar to those of right-wing nationalism at the turn of the nineteenth century have been renewed in recent decades by critics and theoreticians who identify themselves as belonging to the political left. Unwittingly echoing Anatole France, Cornel West has characterized this “cultural politics of difference” as the tendency “to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific, and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing” (19).

A decade earlier, Edward Said denounced the cultural imperialism of nineteenth-century orientalism that privileged ‘vision’ over ‘narrative,’ by which he meant the universalizing and reifying categorization of the colonized designed “to wipe out any traces of individual Arabs with narratable life histories” (229), eliminating both sensuous particularity and historical contingency. And while Lyotard found that it is narrative—the grand Enlightenment narrative of human emancipation—that effects universalization, the thrust of his critique of modernism is to open a path toward ‘little stories’ that would preserve the identity of minority groups or colonized cultures. For Homi Bhabha, “the aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization” (162). In this stance we can hear echoes of the Lacanian valorization of the nonnarcissistic Other as well as of the deconstructive critique of that philosophical notion of truth as presence which acts to marginalize and ultimately to repress difference. Shoshana Felman summarized “Derrida’s . . . critique . . . of traditional philosophy,” in the assertion that “Western metaphysics is based on the totalitarian principle
of so-called logocentrism, that is, on the repressive predominance of ‘logos’ over ‘writing’ . . .” (22). Others claim that the totalitarian principle has arisen not from Western metaphysics in general, but more specifically from the “Enlightenment’s universalism and rationalism.” In “Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics,” Chantal Mouffe has described these twentieth-century attacks on “the idea of a universal human nature, of a universal canon of rationality through which that nature could be known as well as the traditional conception of truth” (369–70).

An important segment of feminist thought has participated in this movement, as can be heard in the call that Julia Kristeva issued in 1979, in “Women’s Time”: “[T]he struggle is no longer concerned with the quest for equality, but, rather, with difference and specificity . . . in order to discover, first, the specificity of the female, and then, in the end, that of each individual woman” (196). Luce Irigaray put the negative case in forceful terms: “Any universal [other than that of the natural economy] is a partial construct and, therefore, authoritarian and unjust. . . . [O]ur identity cannot be constructed without a vertical and horizontal horizon that respects that difference between the sexes” (205). Sandra Bermann concluded that American feminists have been even more radical opponents of the universal, more committed proponents of the particular that grounds cultural diversity in “specific feminist histories, in which differences of race, religion, class, ethnic group and sexual preference are foregrounded” (105). In short, as Joan Scott has observed in her book on the parity movement, for these “first wave” feminists, Enlightenment ideology was a false universalism, for the allegedly neutral figure of the abstract subject was in fact “imagined as male” (Parité 4).

Champions of universalism have not remained silent during this time, starting with Julien Benda’s epoch-making La trahison des clercs (Betrayal of the Intellectuals; 1927; see also Chaitin, “Education and Political Identity”). Writing in the aftermath of World War I and during the rise of fascism and Nazism, Benda bemoaned the fact that even intellectuals, including leading writers and university professors, had abandoned the universalist principles that make the disinterested pursuit of truth possible in favor of practical and political interests. Those modern intellectuals who not only love the particular but raise it to the level of a divinity in a new practical religion assuage the consciences of the politicians and the citizens who indulge in the worst forms of egotistical passion, the love of self writ large that constitutes modern nationalism. In the early 1960s, Jean-Paul Sartre chimed in with his attempt to reconcile universalism and particularism, G. W. F. Hegel and Soren
Kierkegaard, via his concept of the “singular universal,” according to which man is the being who brings forth the universal by transcending (dépasser) the absolute singularity of the contingent events of life and history, giving them meaning (le sens; “L’universel singulier” 174–75).

Once particularism had shifted to the left, voices from the right, most notably Alain Finkielkraut in his Defeat of the Mind (La défaite de la pensée; 1987), adopted Benda’s arguments to fuel a frontal attack on the anticolonial ideology of UNESCO and on the particularist aspects of structuralist, poststructuralist, postcolonial, and postmodern thought. His basic argument is that, in rejecting European universalism as a disguise for ethnocentrism and colonial domination, in emphasizing difference and cultural identity at the expense of Man and the real person in place of the abstract individual, the ‘decolonizers’ have reverted to the ideas of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Oswald Spengler, espousing the narcissistic love of self in the form of one’s ethnic or class identity and destroying any sense of a legitimate hierarchy of values (58). The logical result of this reasoning is that the peoples of the former colonies have now become the slaves of their national identity (95 French ed.; 69 English ed.). For the Enlightenment, freedom was impossible for the ignorant (168 French ed.; 125 English ed.). One became an individual in overcoming appetites, self-interest, and prejudices. For consumer society, on the contrary, freedom and culture are defined by the satisfaction of needs; thus the idea of distancing oneself from “instinct and tradition” has been lost (169 French ed.; 125 English ed.). With the current challenges to the Enlightenment, the ideas that form the basis of our modern schools—only thought confers autonomy and only self-exertion produces thought—have fallen by the wayside (169–70).

**Bourget and the Lessons of Literature**

The attempt to create a new national identity of loyal citizens of the Republic based on universal secular morality rather than God-given commandments produced a trauma in the national psyche that gave rise to culture wars very similar to those of today in France, the United States, and elsewhere. In undermining the Catholicism that had offered easy answers to the questions at the root of identity, the reforms created an existential angst to accompany the political and social anxiety resulting from the upheavals and wars since the Revolution, above all the devastating military defeat in the Franco-German War of 1870–71 and the bloody civil war of the Paris Commune in 1871. Now both
education and identity became political matters. What might seem at first sight to be narrow questions of pedagogy such as curriculum or teaching methods became, therefore, entangled in what might be called the first experiment in postmodern performativity, a complex effort on a hitherto unprecedented scale to alter the identity of a modern nation. For that reason, disputes over education produced a kind of ideological polygamy in which, as Mona Ozouf so happily put it: “[P]edagogy was married to law, politics, economics, metaphysics and morals” (18). And, I would add, to literature as well.

While it was primarily in the schools that the determining battles were waged from the 1880s until well after the turn of the century, it was in narrative that the human implications of the issues raised by the education wars were articulated, appraised, and dramatized (on the role of the serial novel, see M. Ozouf 18). In his highly influential *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883) and the *Nouveaux essais* (1885; see Mansuy 372–76), Paul Bourget puts narrative in opposition to education, but as its rival as much as its negation. His opening gambit is to establish the parallel and thus the implicit competition between literature and institutional forms of education such as religion and the public school system. In the forewords to both volumes he justifies his “psychological” analysis of literary works, rather than the normative aesthetic judgments or the biographical accounts customary in the criticism of the times, by setting up literature as a powerful force in the moral education of the young, in overt conflict with parental upbringing and traditional influences (“Avant-Propos de 1883” xvi; “Avant-Propos de 1885” xx).

The novelist as educator was in fact a common theme in nineteenth-century France. Jules Vallès made the point more succinctly and more brutally than Bourget in “Victimes du Livre,” an article reprinted in *Les réfractaires* (1876)—“The Book Will Kill the Father”—as well as in his novel *L’enfant* (1878). A few years after Bourget, Maurice Barrès would describe his antiauthoritarian *Culte du Moi* novels as a work of edification (“Examen des trois romans idéologiques” 17). Alphonse Lamartine, Victor Hugo, George Sand, Émile Zola, Bernard Lazare, and many other writers agreed that their mission was to educate the public.

Literature is a powerful educational force, yes—but, according to Bourget, in the wrong direction. Unfortunately, the moral lesson of the major writers of the preceding generation, those who exercise the strongest influence on present-day youth, is the loss of traditional values compounded by the failure to replace them. The present generation in
France suffers from a sense of pessimism and depression that is not just the effect of Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy but betrays the existence of a deep crisis, a “moral malady” (“Avant-Propos de 1885” xxii). Having enumerated the symptoms of the modern illness of decadence, Bourget proceeds to diagnose its profound cultural causes rendered visible in the literature of the Second Empire: dilettantism, nihilism, and cosmopolitanism; the perversions and impotence of modern love; the effects of science; the conflict between democracy and high culture. Ultimately he isolates two pathogenic bacilli under his cultural microscope: science and democracy. It is they that have dried up the wellsprings of moral life, without having found a way to replenish them (xxv). Now, under the Third Republic, the infection is being spread by the schools, the main effect of whose teachings is to undermine the identities of their pupils (166–67).

Bourget conjures up the fantasy of an army of nihilists launched on a crusade of negativity, destroying everything in a paroxysm of rage at being unable to find certain knowledge (Essais de psychologie contemporaine 84). Contingency has thus invaded the bastion of belief, with one set of ideas being considered just as valid as another, and its agents provocateurs are science and democracy abetted by the diversity of ‘races.’ The insidious march of contingency is not content with planting its black flag of anarchy in heaven, earth, and society; it inflicts a similar fate on identity in the writings of Gustave Flaubert. Adapting the power of romantic prose to describe the concrete details of decor, costume, and the representation of character, he succeeded in giving fictional realization to the English conception of the inner self as an “association of ideas,” by depicting the series of images that pass through the heads of his characters and capturing the rhythm of their recurrence (165). With this unique blend of romanticism and science, Flaubert depicts the ‘ego’ as the ‘collection of little facts’ of Hippolyte Taine’s theories (166). As Bourget explains in his essay on Taine, the basic problem is that this notion of the self as a series of events jettisons the idea of an abiding “substance” behind mental phenomena and thus that of an immortal soul (226). In the realm of the self multiplicity is not only the archenemy of unity, order and harmony; its very presence calls into question the necessity and perpetuity of being.

The only island of certainty in this sea of skepticism is the science Taine espoused in his philosophy. Here at last is a single principle of cause and effect capable of unifying all of nature by means of the inductive logic that makes it possible to subsume the observations of particular phenomena under larger and larger general laws. The trouble is that
this system, which exalts the power of the human mind, at the same
time abases the individual will before the inexorability of the supreme
forces of the natural and social milieus. The only sensible counsel in this
situation is the ethic of resignation preached by Spinoza or Goethe. For
Bourget, although not for Taine himself, the inevitable effect of science
is once again a kind of nihilism (242–43). In literature, this concep-
tion has led to the reduction of the self to a kind of nothingness caught
between instinct and milieu in the fiction of the naturalist school of
Zola and his disciples, just then at the height of their influence in the
aftermath of the *Soirées de Médan* manifesto and the polemical essays of
the *Roman Expérimental*.

Literature produces devastating as well as salutary effects, precisely
because art is the great competitor of life. The tragic flaw of the con-
temporary adolescent is the desire to know and experience everything,
a desire he can satisfy in no other way than through reading. The idyl-
llic unity and energy of his childhood self and world are consequently
swamped by an uncontrollable tide of disparate ideas and forces—causal,
critical, educational, political, and international.

The hero of this tragic tale is ostensibly the youth whose sensibility
is educated through his contact with literature, but Bourget intimates
clearly that in fact its vicissitudes recount the fate of reading in general
in modern France. Instead of preparing us for experience or substituting
for it, reading distorts experience, prevents us from enjoying or even
from having it, as with Emma Bovary. The constant bombardment of
heterogeneous ideas isolates us from nature, society, and the uncon-
scious wellsprings of personality, precluding the formation of a stable,
unified, and forceful self, secure in its relation to other people and the
world. Reading must therefore be added to science and democracy as
the third scourge of modern society. Narrative may be our best source of
knowledge about the moral life understood in its widest sense as the life
of sentiments and values, as Bourget repeatedly asserts, but it is also, he
continues, at least in its present decadent and naturalist forms, a teacher
of demoralization and despair.

**The Novel of Ideas**

In his essay on the Goncourt brothers, Bourget contrasts their objective
“novels of observation” with the distortion of reality found in the “the-
sis novels” of Sand (*Essais* II 155–56). Although Bourget does not dwell
on the topic, his little phrase *roman à thèse* was destined to become a
catchword in the succeeding decades, precisely because it came to stand for everything that was considered worst in the myriad attempts to carry out the program of merging politicized morality and the fictional representations of identity in the literature of the Third Republic. Indeed, the very name of this subgenre has remained a term of opprobrium to this day, a curious and possibly unique fact of literary history that is all the more surprising in an era that prides itself on having abandoned, at least officially, the notion of a hierarchy of genres. (See, for instance, the passages by Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir quoted in the Grand Robert dictionary’s entry under “roman à thèse”).

The solidification of the name ‘thesis novel’ with its henceforth inseparable stigma occurred as a result of the convergence of developments both within the field of literature and outside it in the culture at large. The crucial precondition for this process was the transformation of the literary field during the Second Empire, which was increasingly dominated by l’art pour l’art on the one hand, and the positivist notion of realism on the other. The first condemned the novel of ideas for besmirching the purity of art, which should maintain its autonomy by excluding all supposedly external discourses such as those of politics, philosophy, religion, or morality—the ability to incorporate, which critics from Friedrich Schlegel to Mikhail Bakhtin have singled out as the defining characteristic of the novel form. The second redefined the concept of proof in keeping with the empiricist method of induction from the observation of a multitude of particular cases to general truth, rather than the illustration of a predetermined general idea, as was the case in the classical conception. However contradictory the two movements may have been in certain regards, they came together in defining a new meaning of objectivity as disinterestedness, according to which the subject—the perceiving, feeling, and thinking mind—can reach truth only by refraining from injecting itself into the phenomena it surveys or the art it is creating. From this perspective, the problem with the thesis novel was not the fact that it contained an idea but that it inserted an unwanted subjective meaning into its representation and consequently departed from objective presentation.

The progressive hardening of the theoretical category of the thesis novel would not have taken place had it not been for the simultaneous proliferation of novels that, in the eyes of the critics, deviated from that standard and therefore had to be defended or attacked, depending on the commentator’s point of view. Writing in 1908, Jean Charles-Brun accumulates quotations on the subject by Bourget, Flaubert, Ferdinand Brunetière, Jules Lemaître, and Léon Blum, not to mention lesser lights
such as Édouard Rod, René Doumic, Victor Marguerite, Jules Bois, Marius-Ary Leblond, Eugène Montfort, Adolphe Brisson, Jean Viollis, and others. He concludes that the recent proliferation of thesis novels and social novels results from the democratization of literature combined with the increased pressure of the social environment on contemporary novelists, and he adduces as evidence the fact that the two eras that produced the most such novels were those that witnessed the most widespread debates about social issues—the period around the Revolution of 1848 and that of the Dreyfus Affair (*Le roman social* 53–54, 57).

Several years later, Marcel Proust would look back on the Dreyfus Affair as a time when, urged to come down from their ivory towers, writers used this excuse to “assure the triumph of right, [and] rebuild the moral unity of the nation” rather than perform the “true” function of literature (*The Past Recaptured* 206). Susan Suleiman makes a similar point in her influential treatise on the thesis novel. Noting that the Dreyfus Affair divided the country into two political groups that had virtually nothing in common, a division that lasted all the way to the Vichy government in 1940, she asserts that it’s not by chance that this period of ideological polarization produced so many thesis novels: “The thesis novel is a genre in which ideological polarization is manifested both as a basic theme and as an organizing structural principle” (*Authoritarian Fictions* 69).

The literary culture wars that accompanied this polarization had already begun in the 1880s, in reaction to the Ferry educational reforms and the Opportunists’ attempts to separate Church from State. Octave Feuillet’s *La morte* (*Aliette*) (1886) and Bourget’s *Disciple* (1889), both of which focus on the disputes between supporters of the Church and partisans of secularization, mark the onset of this new series of novels of ideas. Each of the other major novels of education I study in this book—Barrès’s *Novel of National Energy* (in addition to *The Disciple*) on the political right, France’s *Contemporary History* and Zola’s *Truth* on the left—was at least partly composed in reaction to the ideological issues raised during the Affair. While the first volume of Barrès’s trilogy was published a few months before the Dreyfus case became a national affair, it already broaches several of the main political and social themes that would form the program of Barrès’s nationalism in the succeeding years; and the two other volumes reinterpret earlier events, such as the phenomenon of Boulangism (1886–1889) and the Panama Canal graft scandals (1892–93), in light of the Affair (see Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès* 217–20). France’s tetralogy was also overtaken in the middle by the Affair, which cast a different light on the earlier volumes. It starts
out as a critique of the republican leaders’ complicity with the Church during the 1890s, after Pope Leo XIII called on the French Church to “rally” to the Republic and the government had instituted the policy of the “new spirit” of reconciliation with the Church, before the Affair (see appendix A). In the later volumes, however, the Affair swallows up the earlier plot and appears, retrospectively, to be the logical outcome of those earlier phenomena. In writing his novel after the general amnesty had quieted the most violent passions of the Affair, Zola constructed his fictional transposition with the aim of drawing the social and political lessons the government was trying to squelch by pardoning all parties involved, even those guilty of deception, fraud, forgery, and perjury.7

In her “Notice” to the Pléiade edition of France’s L’anneau d’améthyste, one of the four novels comprising his Histoire contemporaine, Marie-Claire Bancquart states that the writer was responding to the same “neurosis of national identity” that inflated the Dreyfus case into a national affair. Indeed, the structure of French national identity, already shaken by the defeat at the hands of the Prussians and the Ferry educational reforms, was shattered to the core by the Affair.8 For those on the left, it was clear that the nation had abandoned its historical mission, and with it, its national identity of spreading human rights and liberating the peoples of the world from their tyrants. Dumbfounded by this turn of events, France’s spokesperson in the novels, Professor Bergeret, imagines that the brains of his countrymen have been mysteriously lobotomized. Zola put the case forcefully in his “Declaration to the Jury” at his trial for libeling the authorities who framed Dreyfus for treason:

The Dreyfus Affair has become a petty matter at this point . . . compared to the terrifying questions it has raised. . . . Now we need to know if France is still the France of the rights of man, the nation that gave liberty to the world and which should give it justice. Open your eyes and see that, if it is so helpless and confused, the French soul must be stirred to its inmost depths in the face of such redoubtable perils. A people cannot be subject to such distress without its very moral life being in danger. (Vérité en marche 79)

Those on the right perceived the same crisis of national identity but attributed it to the temerity and lack of patriotism of those who challenged the verdicts of the military courts that condemned Alfred Dreyfus and exonerated Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy (the real perpetrator of the treason). By undermining the credibility of the army and its courts,
the ‘intellectuals’ who defended Dreyfus represented a mortal threat to the very idea of the homeland (speech by former minister of war Eugène Cavaignac, December 1, 1901, cited in Girardet 174–76). Barrès claimed to discover the source of this antipatriotic evil in the Kantian universalism taught in the schools and universities of the Republic.

Verbalism that distances the child from all reality, Kantianism that uproots him from his soil and his dead, overproduction of high school graduates that creates what we’ve called, after Bismarck, “a proletariat of degree-holders,” those are our reproaches to the University, those are what make its products, the “intellectuals,” enemies of society . . . The philosophy that the State teaches is responsible . . . for people think[ing] it is intellectual to scorn the national unconscious and to cause the intellect to function in [the realm of] pure abstraction, beyond the plane of reality. (Scènes et doctrines 45)

The Kantian universalism of the Republic is destroying the identity of its citizens, based on their regional, racial, and historical heritage. These rootless intellectuals have become enemies of society who place their individual ideas above the cause of national unity. They are “individuals who convince themselves that society should be founded on logic and who fail to recognize that it rests in fact on prior necessities that are perhaps foreign to individual reason” and thus fail to content themselves with their proper role in the social order (38).

The birth of the Republic, with its universal suffrage, universal education, and the influential role of public opinion in an era of expanded journalism and publishing, provided an advantageous context for the abundance of novels of ideas (Masson 7). In a democracy, however imperfect it may be, the writer has a special role to play in the fight to establish the meaning of events in order to sway the public toward the policy or candidate she favors (see Barrès, Mes cahiers 139–40). More over, although traditional criticism, from Plato on, has often seen an unbridgeable gap between the particularity of narrative and the universality of cognitive discourse, critics at the turn of the twentieth century asserted that the novel was well adapted to convincing readers of the validity of general ideas precisely because its very particularity gave it, like life itself, “the violence of the concrete” (René Johannet, quoted in Charles-Brun 49–50). If the critics justifiably perceive many thesis novels as authoritarian, that is because such texts magnify the ever-present but more hidden coercive force of every symbolic system that functions within or like a language.
The Enemy Within

Given the widespread view under the Third Republic that the schools and teachers possessed the enormous power to control the welfare, the destiny, and the very being of the nation, novels about education were inevitably, and in many cases explicitly, conceived to be examinations of the formation of national identity. My emphasis is therefore on texts in which the emotionally charged relation between teachers and pupils, at one level or another of the educational hierarchy, plays a major role in representing specific ideological systems of education current in the national debates instigated by the Ferry reforms. The four novels I examine in this book respond to the trauma of identity by uncovering what I would term the erotics of politics: the subjective roots of political and social arrangements and the central fantasies that structure the relation of the subject to social realities entailed by competing ideological positions. In order to make their political programs appealing and those of their adversaries abhorrent, these texts deploy fantasy scenarios that mobilize the fears and desires awakened in the public by the attempt to replace the Catholic Other with that of the Republic.

The perceived loss of an absolute source of truth and guarantor of social cohesion in the form of Catholicism and the monarchy awakened in French consciousness a sense of the contingency of symbolic systems, of the Other’s feet of clay. In each of the four model novels I will examine a rent is opened up in the fabric of the regnant symbolic system that threatens to expose the traumatic Real that system serves to shield from view. For Bourget and Barrès, it is Enlightenment science and universalism that rings hollow; for France and Zola it is God, Catholicism, and spiritualism that are mere covers for emptiness. As Ernesto Laclau argues, by affirming the lack in the Other’s Other, these texts imply the existence of an impossible plenitude, the utopia of an unfulfilled demand from society. Each, then, offers to fill the void, and thus to shore up the nation’s identity, in the battle to name and thus constitute what Lacan calls the a-object, that whose possession would confer complete fulfillment on its possessors (Laclau 96–100). Taking on the role of educators of the nation, the four writers intervened in the national debate, redefining its terms by dramatizing the formation and destruction of the ideological fantasies that structure social reality and sustain the representation of imaginary communities (see Žižek, “Sur le pouvoir politique” 43).

The most visible theme common to these works as to the polemics of republican and antirepublican forces was the need for unity, a
unity supposedly lost through the machinations of the other side and recoverable only if the correct group were permitted to direct national education according to its principles. The unspoken presupposition is that unity is equivalent to identity, for both the person and the nation. While the sources of disunity are identified differently by writers of the left and those of the right, the fundamental fantasy underlying each political program is the conviction that the adversarial party, the primal enemy, has somehow penetrated within the bastion of the self; indeed, as conceptualized in Lacan’s notion of the ‘extimate,’ that the very root of its existence comes from outside the self. On the national level, the homeland is portrayed as striving to rid itself of an alien element which is, in fact, as Barrès puts it in a telling passage, “the most intimate part” of itself.
A Matter of Life and Death: 
Secular Education versus the Catholic Church

The laws on educational reform introduced in 1880–82 constituted the first major set of legislation pushed through by the loose coalition of republican groups who, under the leadership of the so-called Opportunists—Léon Gambetta, Ferry, and others—had captured the majority of seats in the lower house in the elections of 1877 and in the Senate in 1882, thus ratifying the victory of the Republic over its traditional opponents, the legitimist (Bourbon) and Orleanist monarchists, and the Bonapartist supporters of a new Empire-style dictatorship. Like most legislation, whatever its ostensible goals or actual effects, the reform laws were meant to serve a political purpose, first and foremost, that of ensuring the long-term survival of the still very much embattled Third Republic (see Chaitin, “France Is My Mother” 130–31). As Ferry put it in a speech delivered some ten years earlier, education was a matter of life or death for the Republic: Democracy must choose between science and the Church (Salle Molière speech of April 10, 1870; reproduced in Legrand 237). The legislation attacked the power of the Church, now allied with the old oligarchy of aristocrats and an important segment of the traditional bourgeoisie, and at the same time was designed to allay fears of a new social revolution by the working classes—which is why the socialist parties, still weak from the bloodletting through which the
self-appointed Versailles government had annihilated the Communards in 1871, gave it only lukewarm support (M. Ozouf 84). Above all, it was designed to give the republicans a foothold in every village and rural area in the land, essential to combating the influence of the local priest and thus to attaining political power in a regime of universal suffrage, as Gambetta had seen as early as 1871.

The role undoubtedly played by strategies of power politics and crass political calculation should not obscure the importance of the specific ideological content of the proposed reforms or the sincerity of the convictions of those who promulgated these reforms. While they were no doubt conceived to justify the program to potential members of the political movement and to respond to the economic realities of the modern industrial world (Eros 258), the goal of safeguarding the longevity of the Republic required something more than concocting a program that would increase the party rolls and win the upcoming election. It entailed the attempt to create something new in the world, a large body of loyal republican citizens who would no longer be susceptible to the dictates of the Church or to the seductions of authoritarian dictatorship—“Caesarism” in the catchword of the enemies of Bonapartism (see Albanese, Molière à l’École républicaine 3–6).

The novelty and enormity of the task confronting this effort at cultural revolution can be properly measured only against the backdrop of the social realities of France in 1870. Although united administratively, most of the country had none of the characteristics of a modern nation as defined by the nationalist rhetoric of Ernest Renan or Maurice Barrès, or by the standards of more recent social theorists. As Eugen Weber emphasizes,

[O]utside the urban centers, over much of France there was no “common history to be experienced as common,” no “community of complementary habits,” little interdependency furthered by the division of labor in the production of goods and services, and only limited “channels of social communication and economic intercourse.” (486)

The slogans for this program had been devised and the program worked out in the waning years of the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic, but the fundamental ideas went back, as Ferry noted more than once, to the Revolution and the “principles of 1789,” especially as applied to education in the writings of Condorcet. If a significant portion of the public became receptive to them in the first decade of the Republic, it was not because the ideas were new at that time, but
because so many of the country’s leaders attributed the disastrous outcome of the war against Prussia to the superiority of the German school system. (See Gambetta’s Bordeaux speech of 26 June 1871, in Discours et plaidoyers choisis 67.)

During the Empire, the Church had begun to operate essentially as a political party, first in support of Napoleon III, who realized at the beginning of his reign that, like his namesake, he needed its cooperation in order to consolidate his hold on power, and then in opposition to his regime as the latter leaned farther and farther toward the pro-democratic and anticlerical forces among the ruling group, especially insofar as they backed the fledgling Republic of Italy in its conflicts with the papacy. Although it had a liberal wing headed by Bishop Dupanloup and the Duke de Broglie, and a reactionary faction whose most outspoken proponents were Bishop Freppel and the notorious polemicist Louis Veuillot (the model for Zola’s rabid Catholic journalist, Vuilet, in La fortune des Rougon), throughout the first two decades of the Republic, until Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical in 1892 calling for Catholics to “rally” to the Republic and even beyond, the political arm of the Church aligned itself with one form or other of monarchy and against the Republic. In reaction to the collusion between the Church and the dictatorial Empire, liberal proponents of democratic freedom claimed to perceive the same authoritarian principles in Catholicism that they found in the rule of Napoleon III, and they proceeded to denounce the moral teachings of the Church and the schools in which those tenets were disseminated.

While education had always been a point of focus for republican politics in France, the issue took on a new urgency after the passage of the Falloux laws under Louis-Napoleon’s aegis as president of the Second Republic in 1850, which, under the guise of the “freedom of education,” had delivered virtually the entire French educational system into the hands of the Church. In reaction, Edgar Quinet issued the polemical pamphlet that Jules Ferry would later call “my breviary” (Eros, 277 n25), L’enseignement du peuple (1850), which argued that there was an inextricable contradiction between secular and religious education, for political freedom is possible only in countries where freedom of thought and conscience are protected, while the Catholic Church prohibits both. Moreover, in order to ensure civil peace, the modern State has a vital interest in teaching a “social morality” of religious tolerance, while the Church, with its claim to be the unique possessor of truth, must instruct, and does in fact instruct, its pupils to condemn other religions as invalid. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s De la
justice dans la Révolution et dans l’Église (1858) pitted the revolutionary ethic of individual freedom and equality, founded on the ‘new idea’ of Justice, against the morality of indignity and resignation to the evils of this life, based on the old dogma of original sin. A few years later, from 1865 until the war with Prussia, Proudhon’s call for a new republican ethic independent of religion was given widespread currency in the journal La Morale Indépendante, founded by the former Saint-Simonian Alexandre Massol. In a similar spirit, the comparatively liberal minister of education, Victor Duruy, had introduced in 1865 a “neutral”—that is, nonsectarian—course of moral education into the so-called special secondary schools, which offered professional training in commerce and business. In the meantime, the philosopher Étienne Vacherot, following Proudhon and recalling the ideas of Jules Michelet and the republican opposition to the July Monarchy, made liberty the basic principle of all law, rights, and justice, and stressed that the most fundamental freedom is that of thought. Sheltered from legal control, this freedom is nevertheless subject to inhibition by ignorance and superstition. As a result, in a democracy this liberty creates the essential duty for families and for the state to provide education and moral training to its citizens (La démocratie 5). This was also the profound belief of Jean Macé, a socialist journalist of 1848 turned schoolteacher, who founded the Ligue de l’Enseignement in 1866 to promote popular education via the principle of free, obligatory primary schools. The way was thus prepared for Gambetta’s strategy in his electoral campaigns of 1869 and 1871: In order to create citizens of the Republic, we must combat ignorance, but in order to combat ignorance we must combat the Church, since the Church fosters ignorance (Chaitin, “France Is My Mother” 132–34). To the working-class population of Belleville, he promised “primary education, laïc, free and obligatory” in 1869 (Mona Ozouf 30). In 1871, he returned to the theme, insisting that the moral training in the Congregationist schools was designed to make the children hate the modern republican values of free inquiry, science, tolerance, and humanity and thus divide the country into two warring factions (report of speech in Gambetta’s newspaper, La République Française, November 25, 1871, in Mona Ozouf 27).

Gambetta’s defense of free inquiry and science indicates the other main intellectual source of his educational policy, the positivism of Auguste Comte and Émile Littré. Proposing a remedy for the defeat at the hands of the Prussians and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in his pivotal speech in Bordeaux on June 26, 1871, he mapped out a strategy for “regenerating the country and founding a free government”
that combined the Proudhonian concern for the emancipation and well-being of the peasants and working classes with the positivist principles of modern education and scientific progress into a policy that would form the basis of the radical republicans’ platform for the subsequent decade. Its key planks were the avoidance of violence, concentration on one issue at a time, and designation of rearmament and universal national education as the essential first steps in the establishment and consolidation of the Republic (Discours et plaidoyers 66).

But of what, precisely, will this universal education consist? First and foremost, of science, especially the ‘exact sciences’—mathematics and the natural sciences (72). No longer is there a reason to be afraid of spreading such knowledge to the hitherto unenlightened population, Gambetta continues, attempting to allay the fears of the traditional bourgeoisie, whose conviction that critical rationalism leads to social unrest had prompted them to support the Falloux laws since the 1850s (Weisz 98). On the contrary, we must show the upper classes that it is in their best interest to have an enlightened populace of workers and peasants; the disastrous results of the war demonstrate that it is vitally important to cultivate this as yet untapped source of energy and abilities. Moreover, once the peasants understand the advantages they have already derived from the republic and the benefits they can expect from it in future, starting with the fact that it was the Revolution that made it possible for them to acquire the land they now possess and gave them the right to own it, they will be eager to support the government rather than seek to overturn it. Similarly, we must teach the working classes that their government is not a greedy, external master but a legitimate emanation of their own sovereignty, while allowing them to benefit from the advances of modern science and civilization. Moreover, the scientific method of thinking can liberate the minds of all citizens, regardless of social class. At the same time, the objectivity of that method, its alleged disinterestedness, ensures the equal treatment of citizens and the lack of bias of the republican government, which alone makes objective reason rather than class interest the basis of its policies. In short, such education can provide liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness for all citizens. In fact, when Paul Bert, a pupil of the renowned physiologist Claude Bernard and a member of Gambetta’s editorial team on La République Française, introduced the Opportunist law on universal primary education to the Chamber of Deputies in his speech of December 6, 1879, he listed the same conquests of the Revolution to be included in the new civics course curriculum (L’instruction civique à l’école 6).

Gambetta also implies that acquaintance with the exact sciences has
a greater role to play in the establishment of social order. Here he was perhaps thinking of Comte’s three organizing tendencies of the positive spirit: (1) the mind grows accustomed to submitting to facts and demonstrations; (2) it acquires the habit of always seeking orderly laws within phenomenal appearances; and (3) it develops the custom of considering that all phenomena are regulated by laws. For Comte, then, the study of science inculcates a belief in the rational order of the universe, a conviction that, when transferred to the social world, convinces its holders of the impossibility of sudden change and thus of the fruitlessness of coups d’état and social revolutions. Here again, Paul Bert made this argument quite explicitly in his speech to the lower house of Parliament in 1879, and in a way that reveals clearly the object of the tacit polemic contained in Comte’s principles (8–9).

It might seem incongruous to invoke the name of Comte as the ideological savior of the Republic, since he developed his doctrine specifically in order to counter the “anarchy” of the revolutionary spirit he considered to be a dangerous “metaphysical” illusion, thought that parliamentary democracy was an expression of the “individualist and revolutionary” spirit, and had therefore gladly welcomed Louis-Napoleon’s dictatorship (see Legrand 49–51). By the 1870s, however, most of his disciples had gone over, often reluctantly and with strong reservations, to the republican side (Eros 255; Legrand 49, 54). In the aftermath of the uprising of the Paris Commune and with the memory of the civil strife and class warfare of the short-lived First and Second republics fresh in everyone’s mind, the leaders of the republican factions recognized that the Third Republic would be successful only to the extent that they could convince large segments of the population, and especially the new industrial bourgeoisie, that it was the regime best capable of establishing public order, for the virtue of positivist education, in addition to promoting progress, was precisely that it would assure national unity by inculcating the same ideas in everyone, thereby combating “mental” and “social anarchy” and guaranteeing “social order” (Legrand 47–48, quoting various authors from the two main positivist journals, La Philosophie Positive, edited by Littré, and the Revue Occidentale, run by Pierre Laffitte).

Comte with Kant: The Moral Is the Political

Positivism made a second claim to be the guarantee of social unity: It asserted the existence of a natural and hence universal “social sense”
that acts as the primordial social bond counteracting selfishness and uniting mankind. In the latest version of his theory, Comte insisted that this social feeling is the true source of morality and should therefore be cultivated in children by parents, teachers, and civic leaders (Comte, *Discours sur l’ensemble du positivisme* 166–67; cited in Legrand 37). It was this positivist notion of morality as a fundamental and autonomous human feeling that Jules Ferry adopted as his own in his speeches to the Freemasons in 1875 and 1876. In the first, Ferry repeated Comte’s arguments: that the heart is more powerful than the intellect, that sympathy is as natural an affection as selfishness, that sentiments must be cultivated and developed, and that religion is a particularism, since, as opposed to the universality of true, i.e., positivist, morality, it teaches selfishness in the form of concern for one’s individual salvation (Legrand 182). In the second, he proclaimed that morality is universally human and thus distinct from any metaphysical beliefs (245); it follows that the state has no need for any divine or transcendent source of moral and political legitimacy.

It was quite logical, then, that armed with this conception of the source, nature, and function of morality, Ferry should move its teaching to center stage when proposing his educational reforms for the primary schools to the legislature in the 1880s. The teaching of morality in the public schools became a political issue because it combined the endeavor to establish a new republican national unity with an attack on the Catholic Church’s hitherto unchallenged monopoly on morality and moral training. While positivism had only lately become associated with the republican cause, Ferry could point to a predecessor, Condorcet, whose similar plan for school reforms during the Revolution authenticated the claim that Ferry’s program was consistent with the “principles of 1789.” Before the Chamber of Deputies on December 20, 1880, Ferry pointed out that, like the Positivists, Condorcet asserted that morality is based on natural sentiments and reason, attributes shared by all people regardless of their social class or religion (*Officiel de la République française* 130). “Forming men and citizens” rather than “dialecticians and preachers”—that was the aim of Condorcet’s project and the rationale for his recommendation that the new schools he envisioned should teach the sciences in place of rhetoric and the classics (Salle Molière speech of 1870, in Legrand, *L’influence du positivisme* 225). The phrase “men and citizens” here (which explicitly includes women for both Condorcet and Ferry) indicates people whom society has raised above their natural condition of fatality and inequality. Education is thus a means toward the political end of establishing equality among people, and equality
in turn can be instituted only by ensuring their liberation from natural constraints. To this end, social institutions should free society’s members from “natural” differences due to birth as well as to physical constitution. Democratic education should nurture a sense of dignity in the members of all social classes and allow all members of an egalitarian society to share the same ideas and opportunities (“Discours” 218–22). Hence the call for teaching the sciences, for the latter include not only mathematics and the natural sciences, but also les sciences morales, whose first lessons reveal to the child that he belongs to the great family called the homeland (225). Teaching morality is thus the nexus in which fraternity, the construction of national unity through the cultivation of the “social sense,” is knotted with equality, society’s rectification of natural inequities, by means of liberty, from the constraints of birth and nature.

In Ferry’s ‘breviary,’ Quinet had argued that while liberty is the fundamental political value of the modern state, political freedom cannot exist without freedom of thought (la liberté d’examen). Science, the result of this freedom and the intellectual basis of modern society, has its own certainty, which has no need of religion’s seal of approval. Ferry reiterated this claim before the Senate on November 22, 1880, when defending the teaching of independent morality in the new secondary schools for girls (Robiquet 15). Reversing the Church’s age-old claims to universalism, like Condorcet and Comte, Quinet strove to reduce Catholicism to the status of a particularism. Science “exists by itself, independent and free. It is the general, universal, absolute religion. Particular dogmas manifest the spirit of sectarianism” (L’enseignement du peuple 119). In a society composed of members of several religions, the tenets of any one of them will appear as a form of particularity when measured against the whole. The only way to guarantee the continued existence of such a society is to transmit its basic spirit from generation to generation through a laic education that eschews any “particular dogma” (120). As Ferry will do later, Quinet clinched his argument by citing Condorcet who, already in 1792, opposed morality to the “principles of any particular religion” and used this opposition to call for the separation of religious and secular national education (153).

In short, for these republicans the moral is the political. Independent morality is equated with universality, interpreted as (human) nature, science, society. And universality guarantees autonomy, understood as human independence from nature; as the independence of human nature from the rest of nature; as the independence of individual thought from external control; as the independence of the whole of society from the
domination of any part of itself; as the independence of secular education from religious authority; as the independence of human society from transcendent origins, legitimation, or regulation. As Quinet put it when refuting the Church’s demand in 1850 for “freedom of education,” that is, the right to run their own schools at all levels and everywhere in the country: Freedom is not the solution, it’s the problem; how can society establish and maintain liberty? (L’enseignement du peuple 139).

But if for some republicans the moral was the political when it came to education, for others the political was the moral. Instead of deriving a plan for moral education from what they held to be good for the collectivity, the republican nation, these thinkers took as their starting point the dignity of the individual, claiming that this fundamentally moral conception of humanity is, or should be, the basis of republican politics and hence of democratic education. In place of Condorcet and Comte, wittingly or unwittingly they hark back primarily to Immanuel Kant as their intellectual forefather.

The philosopher and educator Étienne Vacherot (former director of studies at the École Normale Supérieure) argues that democracy is the only true—that is, ideal—form of government, for it alone guarantees justice, the protection of the rights of its citizens. But we become aware of our rights only because of our consciousness of our duties, a realization made possible by the fact that, as human beings, we have reason and free will and are therefore persons in the strict sense (4). At bottom, then, it is freedom that constitutes the essence of being human and the basis of personhood, and it is freedom that democracy must protect. Now what distinguishes democracy from other forms of government? Self-government. Here the notion of autonomy reappears, as in the previously cited arguments, but with one great difference. For Vacherot as for his model, Kant, true autonomy does not simply mean that which comes from within, as opposed to submission to external forces. Real freedom requires legislating for oneself, giving oneself a law: in short, obeying one’s reason, acting in accordance with the moral law (understood in the singular; see Kant 100–1). In the same way, democratic government requires a nation to give to itself and to obey its own laws. In order to guarantee liberty, it must also have equality in the form of universal suffrage, to ensure that each citizen does indeed participate in legislating, even if only indirectly.

The link between morals and politics is therefore asserted to be the concept and practice of self-government. But how can a nation rule itself if its members remain incapable of exercising their reason? Hence
the need for universal education (Vacherot 5). And Vacherot quotes Proudhon’s famous lapidary phrase with approval: “Démocracy is *demopædia*” (in *Démocratie 90*). His acceptance of Proudhon is not limited to the sole need for education. Through Proudhon’s concern for workers and peasants, Vacherot is able to extend the logic of Kant’s notions of freedom and dignity to economic issues. The democracy he is proposing is not simply the idea of Enlightenment liberalism, for when you put liberty first, you can condemn the laissez-faire that leads to economic as well as social and political privileges and servitude (13). With Proudhon he insists that poverty is one of the most potent abridgments of liberty (14). Enlightened socialism acts on the basis of freedom, morality, human dignity (14). Body and soul, matter and spirit are tightly connected in humans. Therefore, in order to free the mind, you must first liberate the body. (During the Third Republic, Vacherot would retreat from this advanced social position.)

In the final years of the Empire, the cause of independent morality was spread by means of the journal of the same name. One member of Massol’s editorial team, Clarisse Coignet, was to become an influential exponent of the new educational system established under the Third Republic. A convert to Protestantism, under the influence of Charles Fourier’s brand of socialism since her youth, and a former member of the Conseil d’Administration of the Lemonnier schools for young women, during the early days of the Republic she spoke out vehemently for laïc education, asserting that Catholicism “is the most powerful expression of intellectual despotism the human mind has ever presented,” while laïc schools are the forerunners of a secular society, the new Republic, the rights of man, individual liberty, universal suffrage, and self-government. The choice is then clear, either Catholicism or modern society (“De l’enseignement laïque en France et en Angleterre” 928–31). The position Coignet states in this article is one she had worked out in detail in the book she wrote during her collaboration on Massol’s journal, *La morale indépendante dans son principe et dans son objet* (1869). Like Massol, she makes liberty “the human fact par excellence,” the foundation of right (*le droit*) and thus of both morality and politics (5). Interestingly, she explains that by making right depend on a personal experience accessible to everyone rather than a conception of universal reason or an external natural law, independent morality ensures respect for the human person, thus avoiding the “crimes and follies” that result from theories that make the ends the ultimate criterion of right as well as those that take the self-interest of the majority as their gauge (5). Without naming them directly, she takes her stand
against utilitarianism, positivism, social Darwinism, and communism all at once. With acknowledgments to Aristotle, Kant, and philosophical “criticism,” Coignet proceeds to remove natural science from the field of morality by claiming that nature is the domain of blind necessity and bloody struggle, while metaphysical (i.e., religious) notions of morals, like science, make people dependent on a higher external order. By thus eliminating individual autonomy and responsibility (41), both ultimately lead to despotism (55). In their place, she endorses the tenets of Kant’s practical reason: the freedom in question is that of justice, a liberty that governs itself according to a law that it freely gives itself and then follows in action (6).

One of the early contributors to La morale indépendante was Charles Renouvier, the most renowned proponent of Kant’s philosophy in France in the nineteenth century. Already famous in republican circles for his Manuel républicain de l’homme et du citoyen (1848), a kind of laic, but not antireligious, catechism in democracy composed for the schoolchildren of the Second Republic at the request of the minister of public education, Hippolyte Carnot (see Agulhon, “Introduction”), Renouvier exercised a decisive influence on the teaching of morality and civics in the educational system of the Third Republic through the dissemination of Kantian ideas in La Critique Philosophique (abbreviated as RCP), the journal he edited along with his collaborator, François Pillon. The editors marked the occasion of the publication of the review’s second volume with a resounding statement whose title sums up their mission: “Republican Doctrine: or What We Are, What We Want to Become” (2.1.1 [August 8, 1872]: 1–16). In it they asserted that the country was in dire need of a “republican philosophy” that would carry on its tradition of lofty principles and rigorous consequences, affirm the human need to believe in the rule of moral law in the universe, and start from a first principle that would lead directly to the doctrines of liberty and equality (1).

After criticizing just about everyone else in sight—the Catholics, the monarchists, the old bourgeoisie, the two Napoleons and their followers, the socialists, the Positivists, and above all the Jacobins—who allegedly betrayed the principles of freedom and equality they claimed to be defending by importing into the Revolution the principles of the Old Regime, imposing artificial unity, extreme centralization, and rule by force, in order to ensure the domination of the majority by an active minority—Renouvier and Pillon announce their first principle, drawn from Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason: “the right of the person . . . the respect due the person,” which comprises the foundation of the republican
principles of liberty and equality ("Republican Doctrine" 5). Since the old habits and traditions of France have been largely uprooted, the country needs a new point around which to rally the nation, and that point should be a true ethics that can be taught in the schools and put into practice in political action (8).

Once the fundamental principle has been accepted of treating people as ends rather than means due to the presence of reason in every human being, everything else follows logically. Conscience and self-interest unite in opposing any universal rule based on selfish or vicious motives; the notion of justice, which requires reciprocity, equal exchange, and the correlation of rights with duties, derives directly from that premise, and freedom is the means necessary for reason to accomplish its moral duty. Hence we must postulate the existence of a real subject of this freedom, both moral agent and citizen. They acknowledge that this is a vicious circle, but, they argue, that is inevitable since first principles can never be proved (12).

For Renouvier, the Kantian scion of the old patrician bourgeoisie (Agulhon, “Introduction” 10–11), the law was the foundation of freedom and equality. This notion of the supremacy of the law, especially when used to oppose socialism along with Caesarism, made his policies appealing to the basically conservative, bourgeois Opportunist republic of the following decade. Yet, unlike the common run of what John Scott has called the “neo-Girondist” conservatives, Renouvier had learned from his contacts with the socialist writings and followers of Saint-Simon, Pierre Leroux, Proudhon, and above all Fourier, from whom he adopted the right to trade unions and producer cooperatives, a right forbidden by law until 1884 (John Scott 70). Unlike the majority of conservatives of the seventies, he attacked the bloody repression of the Communards and protested vigorously the patently unjust treatment of those who had survived the hecatomb of 1871 by the government and courts of the period ("La raison d’État en 1872"). Some twenty years later it would be this notion of the supremacy of the law that would rally many younger intellectuals to the cause of Dreyfus.

Renouvier’s Kantian liberalism was able to produce real effects through its penetration of all levels of the republican educational system (John Scott 76–77). In fact, Kantianism dominated the philosophy departments of French higher education until well after the First World War. Its influence was felt equally in the secondary schools, whose last year included a special course on philosophy. Looking back on the decades since the founding of the Republic and citing the teachings of Renouvier and Jules Lachelier, the philosopher Alphonse Darlu asserted
in 1895 that philosophy, specifically Kant’s doctrine of practical reason, had become a social force in France (249). Kantianism was, if anything, even more influential in the primary schools than in the higher levels of the educational system. While the sponsors of the bills that created the new schools were mostly positivists, those Ferry appointed to formulate and carry out the directives mandated by the laws and the educational commissions they called into being were thinkers heavily indebted to Renouvier or to parallel radical Protestant theology equally under the sway of Kant’s doctrines. Ferdinand Buisson, philosopher, director of primary education, and Ferry’s most trusted adviser on educational matters (and eventual winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1927), Félix Pécaut, pastor, inspector-general of public education, and first director of the École Normale Supérieure at Fontenay-aux-Roses, and Jules Steeg, pastor, inspector general of the Université (i.e., of secondary schools), director of the Pedagogical Museum, and second director of the newly established École Normale Supérieure for women primary schoolteachers and principals at Fontenay-aux-Roses. All three men had been involved in establishing a liberal Protestant Church in Neuchâtel at the end of the Empire (Acomb 55). Although they believed in a personal God, all rejected religious dogmas and, most important, believed in the existence of a universal and eternal independent morality shared by all peoples in all periods of history.

To these educational leaders must be added Mme. Jules Favre (Julie Charlotte Velten), a Protestant from Wissembourg appointed first director of the newly founded École Normale Supérieure at Sèvres, designed to prepare principals and teachers for the new secondary schools for women (F. Mayeur 116). In this capacity she set the tone of the entire system for many years. Author of a study of the Stoic philosophers, she combined their morality with that of Protestantism in her philosophy of education: Teaching is not a mere profession but an apostolate whose mission is to contribute to the regeneration and moral emancipation of the members of the Republic. Mme. Favre strove to inculcate into her pupils the practice as well as the theory of self-rule, allowing them much more freedom of movement than was common in those days in schools for young women, and strongly encouraging them to exercise freedom of thought and independence of action. In the course she herself taught on law, while emphasizing the social advantages of voluntary obedience to the laws of the state, she put the cultivation of the spirit of justice above all utilitarian considerations. Thus she constantly looked at what she took to be the prejudices of her society with
a critical eye. She approved of “free”—that is, purely civil—marriage; thought illegitimate children should have the same rights as others; and, in matters of conscience, taught that passively submitting to paternal authority undermined the freedom and dignity of our moral being (see Réval, Les Sèvriniennes). Above all, as Françoise Mayeur points out, she demanded full equality for women, disavowing the officially accepted programmatic phrase of the times for women’s education, “equality in difference” (121).

Beyond their disputes about the priority of rights or duties, of freedom or the moral law, and beyond their differences of focus, all the thinkers and educators we have discussed agreed that it is the notion of rational self-government that spans the gap between the individual and the state, between morality and politics (Coignet, De l'éducation dans la démocratie viii). The moral sovereignty of the individual becomes the model for the political sovereignty of the people in the republic.

As a result, the greatest challenge Ferry faced in defending his reforms in Parliament was to substantiate the assertion that universal morality does in fact exist. In the Senate session of July 2, 1881, trying to stave off an amendment that would have reinstated the teaching of religious (i.e., Catholic) morality in the girls’ secondary schools, he proclaimed that Catholic, Protestant, evolutionist, positivist, utilitarian, and independent moralities are all the same: “True morality, grand morality, eternal morality is morality without qualification” (Robiquet 175). He continued: “It’s the morality of duty, ours, yours, Gentlemen, Kant’s morality, the morality of Christianity” (176). In his famous letter to the primary schoolteachers of the nation of November 17, 1883, he explained that duty, that is, the universally recognized set of maxims of applied morality, is what counts, a matter independent of the various theoretical bases of ethics (Lettre aux instituteurs, cited in Legrand 156).

The tight relationship between ethics and politics was not just a matter of principle for the Opportunists. In 1871, Gambetta had already accused the Congregationist schools of using moral education for political ends. It was consistent with this view that the bill on primary schools Ferry’s government brought before Parliament in 1879–80 sought to remedy that situation by requiring not simply the teaching of “morals” but explicitly giving pride of place in the new curriculum to “moral and civic education” (Ferry, cited in Reclus 213). In justifying the new civics curriculum before the Chamber of Deputies in 1879, Bert stressed the rationale of inspiring national unity through the teaching of the nation’s “reasons for existence and principles of life,” what today we would call its culture (L'instruction civique 7).
Bert was also quick to add that this instruction is especially necessary since many schools nowadays—meaning the Congregationist schools, of course—teach just the opposite. Ferry himself was not so subtle when responding in the Chamber on December 20, 1880 to charges from the right that a “school without God would be a school against God.” (Note that Bishop Dupanloup had already argued in his diatribe against Littré a decade before that positivism would undermine morality and social unity.) Claiming that the notion of laic schools implies only that they will be nonsectarian, he argued that the purpose of this measure was to ensure the security of the republican state. We must safeguard the primary school system from falling into the hands of the “prelates who have declared that the French Revolution is a deicide . . . [and] that the principles of ’89 are the negation of original sin” (Robiquet 126).

Disparities between Opportunistic Theory and Practice

In a country where changes of regime were as frequent as in France in the nineteenth century, in a republic that was barely ten years old in name and scarcely three years old in fact, the republican form of government was just as much a particularism as Catholicism was, in Ferry’s words, “a particular dogma.” If he and his fellow republicans insisted so heavily on the universality of their civic morality, it must have been in part because they knew that in reality the ethics and the politics they championed comprised just one of several possible systems competing for supremacy in France.

The inherent tension between the ostensible universality and actual particularity within republicanism existed on several levels in the ideology we have been examining and played itself out historically in many guises during the subsequent years of the century. Its most obvious manifestation, of course, was the clash between secular and Church institutions of learning. Much less visible but even more widespread and fateful was the virtual elimination of local peasant cultures in France, effected mostly in the years from 1880 to 1914 in an attempt to create and enforce the national unity so prominent in the pronouncements of thinkers, educators, and politicians alike (Weber 9). The Opportunists made no secret, either, about the fact that their universalism did not extend beyond human and civil rights to the domain of economics; hence the widespread perception that their policy was intended to placate the bourgeoisie by avoiding measures designed to alleviate the condition of the working classes.
The most glaring contradiction between theoretical universalism and practical particularism occurred in the differential distribution and significance of moral and civic instruction. During the Third Republic, the moral teaching aimed at reforming the conduct of children from their first days in school, the instruction that permeated every aspect of the curriculum and drew its examples from everyday life—in short, the lessons designed to create the new citizens of the Republic—were taught only in the primary schools and the new girls’ secondary schools. In the traditional boys’ secondary schools, independent morality entered the curriculum only as a theory in the philosophy class taken in the last year of study. Practical moral training was deemed unnecessary for these pupils because of the high cultural value the French attributed to the Greco-Latin humanities taught in the secondary schools, the study of which was assumed to be sufficient to immunize pupils against all baseness (Bouglé 11). The reason for this difference is not far to seek. The primary schools, free of charge and located in every commune in the country, enrolled the children of the people, while the secondary schools catered almost exclusively to the sons of the bourgeoisie. For the children of the people, despite all the lofty talk about the autonomy of the moral person—or, in a sense, because of it—the thrust of the new moral and civic education was to teach them resignation to their lot in life and obedience to authority (Prost 10; Katan 436).

Children of the people were not the only category whose members were somehow less than universal. As is well known, women were subject to much more significant restrictions on their participation in the benefits of universal rights and moral sovereignty, since under the Third Republic they were once again deprived of the right to vote. In the narrower world of education their allegedly natural differences from men served as the rationale for their unequal treatment. In order to preserve the institution of marriage and secure the “unity of souls” of husband and wife, we must have enlightened women who will second their husbands’ progressive beliefs rather than cause dissension in the family as is now the case due to the nefarious influence of the clergy on ignorant women. It is women who have the greatest educative influence on future citizens, in their role as mothers. In short, it was as wives and mothers, not as citizens in their own right, that educated women were needed to protect the Republic, primarily, as with the primary schools, by weakening the hold of the Church over them (Ferry, Salle Molière speech, in Legrand 235–37; Ferry, defense of Sée bill in Senate, December 10, 1880, in Robiquet 10–15; see also discussion in F. Mayeur 58–60).
While educators of all stripes agreed that moral habits of thought and action must be learned first through practice, and that the example set by the teacher is of primary importance, the main bone of contention among the schoolteachers (instituteurs) was the status of moral theory. At first the teaching was based purely on the intuitive sense of conscience. Already in 1883, however, Louis Liard, rector of the Academy of Normandy and about to be named director of higher education in the Ministry of Public Education, called for a rational demonstration of duty in his primary school textbook, *Morale et enseignement civique à l’usage des écoles primaires* (*Morals and Civic Education in the Primary Schools*), a proposal ratified in a directive issued to the school inspectors in October 1888. Jules Payot, whose *Avant d’entrer dans la vie: aux instituteurs et institutrices, conseils et directions pratiques* (*Before Starting out in Life: Advice and Practical Directions for Schoolteachers*; 1897) was the most popular teachers’ manual until the First World War, insisted that morality is as evident a science as geometry, and, like the mathematical discipline, must be demonstrated logically to the pupils (15 n1). Unfortunately, the inspection reports since 1889 showed that both the teachers and the students were at a loss when it came to providing rational, Kantian proofs of the concepts of morals (16). The problem was that morals are a matter of practice, not theory; hence they require a pragmatic justification as is provided for in positivist sociology.

Here, in the distinction between the rational and the scientific, lies the crux of the disparity between the Kantian and the positivist views, at least as it was perceived by the vast majority of the thinkers of the period. In the simplified terms utilized in journalism, politics, and pedagogical polemics, science means starting from the observation of empirical reality in order to arrive at general laws through the process of induction. Rationalism means starting from a priori principles combined according to logical operations in order to arrive at an understanding of things at the level of phenomena. The one is concrete, the other abstract—and young children, it was argued, are not capable of grasping abstractions. Like scientists, they learn first through the use of their windows onto the world: their five senses. The first project of the educator should therefore be to enhance and train their capacities of observation, to teach them to “observe well” (Payot 16–17). Only later will they be able to move on, as the scientist does, from observation of particulars to seeing the relations among things by abstracting general conclusions from the similarities noticed in comparing multiple observations (17). Instead of lectures, teachers should provide concrete examples in the form of “object lessons” (*leçons de choses*).
It is evident that in crucial respects positivism and Kantianism are totally incompatible. And yet it is equally apparent that, beyond or in spite of their disparities, the two were somehow combined as the quasi-official doctrine of the Third Republic. In “Métaphysique et morale” (1893), the mission statement that led off the first number of the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, the spiritualist philosopher Félix Ravaissone, for many years the dominant force in the philosophy department of the Sorbonne, objected to the recent trend in philosophy to condemn metaphysics as a useless and impossible preoccupation, a trend he attributed to both Comte and Kant (6).

Ravaissone’s manifesto was the spearhead of a more general counterattack usually known as the revival of French spiritualism, which would soon crystallize right-wing opposition to the “new Sorbonne.” This new spiritualism, despite the noisy drumbeating of Ferdinand Brunetière with his visit to the Vatican (“Après une visite au Vatican,” *RDD* [January 1, 1895]), was a far cry from the doctrines of Victor Cousin or Jules Simon, let alone official Church dogma of the period. As with positivism, there was a lag of several decades from the time of its development, in the 1870s and 1880s, to that of its emergence as a political ideology. One of the founders of the movement was Émile Boutroux, for two years the philosophy teacher at the rue d’Ulm of its most famous exponent, Henri Bergson, and also a friend of the influential writer Paul Bourget (Mansuy 305, n154). Like that of Ravaissone, whom Bergson was to acknowledge as an important antecedent to his thought (Thibaudet, *Le bergsonisme* 39), the polemical thrust of Boutroux’s doctrine was directed against both positivism and Kantianism. His point of attack, however, was not so much their common denial of the possibility of metaphysical knowledge as their shared emphasis on universality. As the title of his thesis—*De la contingence des lois de la nature* (*On the Contingency of the Laws of Nature*; 1874)—announces, he set out to break the ironclad concatenation of universal natural laws that rule the entire universe, according to the fundamental scientific premise of his times. Defining science as the attempt to eradicate the multiplicity of experience by reducing it to the one of generality—the type, the concept, the essence—and to eliminate the changeable—history—by reducing it to the immutable—natural laws—he argues that if those laws are not necessary in the philosophical sense of the term, then they must be dependent on something other than themselves. Spontaneity in the universe is not simply an illusion based on our ignorance of the
conditions determining phenomena, but bears witness to the existence of causes outside the laws of nature.

In his demonstration, Boutroux does not challenge science per se; rather, he locates the element of contingency first in the relation between the laws that govern the various levels of natural phenomena. In other words, he claims it is impossible to deduce or derive in any causal or logical fashion the rules of chemistry from the laws of physics, those of biology from those of chemistry, and so on. He concludes that even in the natural world, “everything is thus radically contingent” (De la contingence 29), and when it comes to human beings, where history and individual experience play a much greater role, “acts entail essence, far from essence being able to explain acts. . . . Man is the author of his character and of his destiny” (Boutroux 145). Human behavior is not predictable, for it is not determined in advance by an essence or nature which would act as its cause. In short, as Sartre would reiterate in his own antideterministic arguments in “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” existence precedes essence. The contingency of things is an external sign of this fundamental freedom, which ultimately derives from a purely voluntaristic God—that is, one who, in the last analysis, is not constrained by the laws of logic or rationality.14

While it might seem that this defense of freedom was entirely compatible with Kant’s philosophy of practical reason, in fact Boutroux opposed the latter because, by relegating freedom to the realm of the “intelligible,” the unknowable thing in itself, it leads either to a liberty unrelated to action and morality (the noumenal self outside the empirical world), or to a kind of determinism (of the person as phenomenon in the determined world). His doctrine, on the other hand, entails its real and active presence within the fabric of the known and knowable worlds (149). In this respect, Boutroux is indeed attacking the antimetaphysical bias of Kantianism. But the crux of his argument here, even more so than with regard to positivistic science, turns on the disregard for particulars, for those aspects of individual phenomena and experience that escape from the general categories and laws they deploy as the only knowable reality. At bottom, both modern science and Kantianism postulate a subject of knowledge and action devoid of any contingent subjective conditions that differentiate one rational being from another, as Kant put it, whereas for Boutroux God and people are ‘personal,’ in the sense of being distinct from one another and at least potentially free of any general rule.

It was Bergson’s doctoral dissertation, Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience (Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness; 1889), that did most to reinvigorate French philosophical
Like his predecessor, he responds to the claims of both positivism in its mechanist and associationist branches and Kantianism, with its assertion of a moral freedom in the world of the ‘thing in itself’ outside the domain of temporality, by developing his notion of duration, according to which contingency was tantamount to a freedom opposed not only to any determinism, but to any universal law in general. The core of his opposition to Kantianism, as to scientific predictability in the human realm, is his insistence on the inextricable link between freedom and singularity, what today we would call difference. His basic argument is that human action can neither be predicted in advance nor subsumed under any general law, because to do so one would have to translate mental states into some language, and any language necessarily deals only with generalized abstractions: Words are like numbers or algebraic notation in that they can be applied to whole classes of objects, precisely because they ignore all the concrete, sensory, and historical aspects of things. But each mental state, like the moments of the history of a nation, is unique in its genre, and will never again be reproduced. The qualitative multiplicity of such moments represents “phases of our real, concrete duration, of heterogeneous duration, of living duration” (181).

The new spiritualists all agree, then, that at a very fundamental level, that of the abstract, rational subject of science and of moral action, positivism and Kantianism are one. As we shall see in more detail in chapter 3, however, this perceived unity did not preclude a political alliance of certain strains of spiritualism and positivism against parliamentary democracy and the Third Republic. Right-wing nationalism and racism had no trouble amalgamating the emphasis on uniqueness and contingency in Bergson with the similar stress on particularity present in positivism whenever the latter found it convenient to distinguish its own method of empirical observation from the abstract logic of rationalism. When applied to the human realm, as in Renan’s early L’avenir de la science (The Future of Science, composed in 1848), this reliance on empirical data was translated into respect for the uniqueness of historical change and of bodily life (Future 264, English ed.). The goal of this brand of positivism becomes the appreciation of the ethnic differences produced by this spontaneity. In its reverence for life, for individuality, for the creative spontaneity of history, positivism thus took over, from the comparative study of national literatures and the philological study of languages, the leading themes of Romanticism, both German and French.

All that was needed for the emergence of the full-blown nationalist ideology of “the soil and the dead,” and its even more sinister offspring,
the fascist “blood and soil,” was the admixture of the conservative anti-rationalist arguments of Edmund Burke, the German Romantics’ reinterpretation of J. G. Herder, and the indigenous doctrines of Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald, accomplished in Taine’s multivolume Origins of Contemporary France. The crux of their arguments was that in its basic function—namely, voting—democracy treats people as pure abstractions, mere numbers divested of their individual histories, experiences, and feelings, and that this inhumanity is consistent with the Kantian assertion of abstract humanity at the expense of individual sentiments and interests—the “pathological” in Kant’s language—and even with the worst excesses of the Reign of Terror in that there too the life of individuals was sacrificed to abstract principles.16 It is this alleged contradiction between democracy and liberty that presided over the union of antirationalism and right-wing politics and made their proponents adopt Bergson’s arguments about freedom and contingency.17 Once he makes contingency the bastion of freedom insofar as each of us has a unique history that escapes any attempt at characterization through universals, once he describes freedom as acting solely in accord with one’s self as given in duration—the synthesis of that past experience—rather than with any external law, then each region or nation can understand its freedom to consist in its respect for and adherence to its own past, its ancestors, its land, its communal experience, in opposition to and exclusion of everything and everyone it considers alien.

The Crisis of Authority:
France Is My Mother, the Republic My God

Opportunist ideology ignored many of the disparities between Kant and Comte because it was of course meant first of all to unite the largest number of people possible behind the new republic. But in order to do so, along with the concrete rewards it held out to its supporters, it had to convince them and potential converts of the legitimacy of its claim to authority, if only to assure them that it had indeed become the party most capable of ensuring national order and regeneration. The emphasis on independent morality, with its peculiar blend of freedom, autonomy, obedience, and conformity, was a versatile weapon in this battle, allowing the Opportunists to combat Catholicism while at the same time demonstrating their own adherence to a strict moralism that could assuage their compatriots’ sense of guilt and allay their fears of renewed social rebellions.
Like most weapons, however, this one had its drawbacks. As reactionary critics had been complaining since the beginning of the Revolution, with the fall of the monarchy authority had become part of the problem of government, instead of its solution. Bonald had argued that power and law must precede society, since without them no society could ever be formed. Social order must be separate from human will, since it precedes human action (Bonal 95, 151–52). Burke had already proclaimed in 1790 that the existence of society often requires that people’s individual as well as collective passions and wills be controlled and even thwarted, and “this can only be done by a power out of themselves” (151; emphasis in original). Joseph de Maistre’s similar analysis of the insufficiency of authority in constitutional monarchies and republican governments, due to the lack of a “superior authority,” clearly threatens the moral and political principles at the heart of Opportunist ideology also (2; see Gauchet 32–33). By making the source of morality immanent rather than transcendent, the liberals left it open to the charge that it was a partisan matter, to be determined in fact by a particular segment of the population in accordance with its own lights and interests.

It was in order to protect their principles from this kind of attack that the Opportunists insisted so heavily on the universality of their morality and on its foundation in a realm outside the fray of social, economic, and political contention, even if not removed to a domain beyond the world of human life. If the same moral principles had existed forever, in all places and among all human groups, then it could not be argued that they were the result of particular interests. Hence the recourse to the universality of human reason as the basis for republican ethics and politics among the Kantians. Alternatively, if morality was a sentiment engraved into human nature or a fact of social evolution, as the positivists contended at one time or another, then it was independent not only of religion but of any set of ideas or beliefs whatsoever, and therefore all the more universal, albeit in a slightly different sense of the term. In either case, whether based on the authority of reason or of fact, the control of morality was thus put out of reach of any individual group. In short, universality was supposed to assume the role, formerly filled by the transcendence of rule by divine right, of supplying a fixed point from which action could be judged according to an objective criterion independent of the play of contingent forces.

Now one of the major tenets of this universal morality was the assertion of individual freedom, the basic principle of republican politics, both as the freedom of thought that justifies the autonomy of the voter and as the foundation of sovereignty understood as self-rule. While this
capacity was of valuable assistance in combating religious dogma and “metaphysics,” it had the unfortunate potential of inciting criticism of the Republic’s authorities, as well as of its social and political arrangements. It was for this reason that the moral education offered in the primary schools emphasized duty, that is, obedience, before broaching the question of freedom. The main remedy for this problem inscribed into the new curriculum was the coupling of moral training with civic education.

“Moral and civic education,” in the consecrated formula of the educational reform laws, was to furnish the necessary compromise between individual freedom and social responsibility. On the simplest and most evident level, civic instruction was a matter of creating an informed electorate capable of exercising the vote in a mature way (to use Kant’s term for the enlightened person). Thus Bert begins by contrasting republican Enlightenment with monarchical and dictatorial benightedness in explaining the rationale for civics education in his speech to the Chamber of Deputies on December 6, 1879 (Instruction civique 5–6). By this contrast, Bert intimates that Enlightenment is a process of struggle. In the list that follows of topics to be covered in civics classes, he openly invokes the Revolution as the historical and ideological matrix of that conflict, implicitly portrays the present Republic as its dutiful heir, and explicitly characterizes it as the worthy object of its children’s respect and gratitude. Two years later, in his defense of this law before the Senate, Ferry would make the same connection between the Third Republic and the Revolution (see Chaitin, “France Is My Mother” 143–52).

There is a striking similarity between the emotions the Republic is supposed to arouse in its children and the obedience, gratitude, and respect toward their parents the primary school textbooks on morality aim to inculcate in their pupils. Bert and Ferry complete the parallel with sentiments of filial piety when they cap their rationale for civic instruction by adding love to the equation. The first lessons in Bert’s civics textbook treat the virtues of the army and the duty of military service, explaining that the patrie is a great family, telling the children in direct address that it is “your mother.” The child, Bert argues in his speech to the Chamber, must know why he should love France so that he will give himself to it entirely, so that he will defend the homeland and the “principles whose triumph has made of him a free man and a citizen” (6). Strange as it may seem, the notion that you can induce people to love by teaching them why they should do so was also a commonplace in the lessons on children’s attitudes toward their parents in the school ethics texts of the times (Renouvier, “Petit traité” 129).
The justification for the new civics lessons was thus structured by a series of metonymical and metaphorical substitutions: The Revolution becomes the name of the Third Republic (which, of course, came to power not through revolution but thanks to a military defeat followed by a series of proclamations and votes, and which confirmed its existence by crushing a revolution), and the Republic that of France (when the country was still divided fairly evenly between republicans and antirepublicans); at the same time, the Republic was equated with the beneficent parent to whom its citizens owed their very existence (as free men and citizens) as well as a host of other blessings that make life worth living, and to whom they owe in return gratitude, obedience, respect, and ultimately a love whose supreme proof is the willingness to sacrifice their very lives.

Moreover, according to Coignet, only members of free countries really have a homeland, because as citizens they exercise governing functions and make sacrifices for the nation (“Instruction secondaire des jeunes filles” 81). Here she clearly and unequivocally links republican citizenship and autonomous morality to the citizen’s sense of identity. Like the family, the free state becomes the ideal object of both self-love and altruistic love, for, as with the family, the members of a democratic state both have it and are it at the same time. The homeland is not simply France, then, but the Republic, for in it alone personal identity and national identity can coalesce.

In order to ensure social cohesion and responsibility, the new civics instruction relied much more heavily on subjectifying the citizen’s relation to the state through identification and the cultivation of love than on producing the uniformity of ideas recommended by the positivists. The idea of deriving feelings from universal moral principles, rather than the reverse, was consistent with Kant’s doctrines and was also symptomatic of the more general Enlightenment belief in the power of reason to inform and reform not only people’s conduct but their very being. The primary reason, however, why the idea of teaching people to love was unquestioningly presupposed by the authors of laws and textbooks, and so easily accepted by the public, was that it was a simple restatement of traditional religious teachings, particularly the catechism, with the reasons for loving the Republic and acknowledging its authority to be legitimate replacing of those for loving God and obeying His commandments.

In fact, as many scholars have pointed out, Third Republic education strove to make “the homeland [play] the role reserved for God in the Catholic schools” (M. Ozouf 114). By the end of the century, the
schoolteachers of the Republic had become “lay monks,” “lay missionaries of the truth,” “apostles of progress,” “priests of a religion of love” who would “sow the good word in the tender souls of the children” so that their “successors will see the harvest of the ideas of justice and fraternal solidarity germinate” (Laville 332–34; the last quotation is from Payot’s manual for schoolteachers). In her study of Zola’s Truth, Béatrice Laville points out that the drive for secular education was painted as a veritable religious crusade, in which Charles Péguy’s famous **hussards noirs de la république** (black Hussars of the Republic) were to lead the holy war to replace the dying religious faith of the people with the ideals of science and make the schools into the new Church of free thought (334).

Nor was it through the schools alone that the Republic strove to make patriotism into a second religion for the masses. Jean-Marie Mayeur, summarizing the conclusions of several important scholarly works, reminds us of the concerted efforts of the regime to orchestrate a series of representations of the Republic through the construction of sculptural monuments; the elevation of various figures to the status of national heroes; and above all the public festivals, celebrations, and events of the 1880s, which he calls “the rites of a veritable republican liturgy” (83). In 1880, the year July 14 was made into the French national holiday, the Municipal Council of Paris declared that schoolchildren should participate in the official ceremonies in order to rid them of the “practices of superstition.” Like the First Republic, the Third wanted to combat the “old dogmas” by creating a civic religion, and while the Goddess of Reason was not revived, the figure of Marianne gave the Republic a face and a body to worship in place of the Virgin (84; see Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir*). In those early years, the July 14 celebrations aroused special fervor in the popular sections of Paris and the other big cities, where they took on the flavor of “political liturgies” (J.-M. Mayeur 84).

As this last example shows, it was not the patrie as such, but the Republic, that took over the role of God. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the modern idea of the homeland as object of love and veneration was the invention of the Republic. By putting this new version of the homeland into the place of a deity, the Republic strove to construct an “imagined community” characteristic of modern nations (see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*), not so much to replace real human communities destroyed by modernization (although that would become the case more and more as the century came to a close), but to supplant the communities that still existed at the time.21 The community
of republican patriotism was not only ‘imagined’ in Anderson’s sense of a group created by the discourse of the nation spread primarily in the unified languages made possible by the print media; it was above all ‘imaginary’ in Lacan’s meaning of the term, designed to make the individual dependent for his identity, his very being, on the Republic, conceived as a transcendent Other that guarantees that identity in return for sacrificial devotion. By producing the impression that the new regime stood outside the flux of time and thus above partisan divisiveness and earthly incompetence and corruption, it meant to prove itself worthy of the subjective allegiance, identification, and love of all its inhabitants. The transcendence promoted in the civics curriculum thus was to complement the universalism of the moral education in establishing a firm foundation for the authority of the still extremely fragile Republic.

The Conflict of Identities

The new patriotism, then, was an attempt by a particular regime to identify itself with the universal existence of the nation, of an individual class to represent the interests of the nation as a whole, of a specific set of principles to express the will of the entire people. In order to accomplish this feat, it had to convince all its citizens that its interests were their interests, that its heroes were their heroes, that its culture was their culture, that its principles were their principles: in short, that they were it and it was they, and yet at the same time that it was worthy of assuming the parental role, while they should be happy to devote their filial piety and loyalty to it. The fundamental contradiction between the universal and the particular inscribed in this program, which was considered necessary for the very survival of the Republic yet flew in the face of a host of facts, inevitably led to a multileveled civil war of identifications.

The greatest blessing of the republic was supposed to be freedom, autonomy, self-rule. Yet just as the Republic put itself in the position of God in its civics courses, so its educators adhered to the same authoritarian notions and methods as the Congregationists. With Kant’s assertion of the basically evil character of human nature and Comte’s equally strong distrust of the selfishness of the individual, it is not the least bit surprising that the republican schools should have adopted this attitude toward children’s education, nor that Durkheim should proclaim that education is a “work of authority” almost on a par with hypnotic suggestion (Éducation et sociologie 85–87). Although there were a few
voices raised for the principles of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his successors such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel, as Prost explains persuasively, the child’s spontaneity was generally seen as a danger rather than a promise, a source of potential insubordination that must be curbed by strong discipline (9). Independence of mind was a fine ideal for adults, but the goal of children’s education was to indoctrinate them with the proper convictions. Hence the use, in more than one textbook (e.g., Renouvier’s Manuel; Bert’s Instruction civique), of the same method of questions and answers as in the catechism. The strongest advocates of free thought did not allow children to doubt the word of the teacher. As Renouvier puts it in his “Petit traité,” children will be raised to the status of adults, that is, of moral persons worthy of respect and capable of self-government, only when they have learned obedience to duty (RCP 4.49 [January 6, 1876]: 367). He has no trouble reconciling this conception with his liberal principles since, according to him, the authoritarian teacher in fact merely “lends his voice” to reason and conscience (367).

The contrast between an ideology of sovereignty and the reality of impotent obedience was not restricted to children and the schools. As the century wore on, it became most blatant in the case of the growing urban proletariat, aware of their powerlessness in the face of an anonymous and impersonal state. It was this impression that Zola succeeded in capturing so forcefully in Germinal and other novels of the eighties. But his portrayal of the effects of industrial and commercial capitalism omitted one aspect of the situation that exacerbated its action a hundredfold: namely, the sense of real powerlessness was compounded by the promise, new with the Republic and specific to it, of partial control over government through participation in the electoral process.

On the theoretical level, the problem was that the war of identifications took place within the ideology of the Republic itself. The conflict between the universal and the particular emerged in the two incompatible foundations the Republic was trying to use to establish its legitimacy: the abstract, impersonal, universal subject of modern science and autonomous morality and the image of itself as a parental deity modeled after the age-old notion of the God of Christianity. The flaw in this imitation was that the Republic could not portray itself as a personal god without betraying the most fundamental principles of democracy as they were understood in France at the time. The series of authorities going from parents to teachers to the state left no room for a monarch, dictator, or even a president possessed of real executive powers who could serve as the concrete representative of the state. But is it possible
to identify with an immaterial principle rather than with a tangible figure? Can the abstract moral agent stripped of all contingent properties and obedient to reason alone insofar as he acts morally or politically in a democracy at the same time remain the human individual endowed with feelings of pity and gratitude, respect and loyalty?

The most ingenious, even if most evident, attempt to reconcile these opposites was the inscription of the Revolution at the heart of the myth of the Third Republic. The obvious purpose of this maneuver was to provide the fledgling republic with distinguished predecessors, identifying it as the continuation of the historical mission of France. More significant, however, was the endeavor, in imitation of Christianity once again, to redefine history in general in terms of the Revolution. Like the advent of Jesus, it was conceived as an occurrence both within history and outside it, a meeting point between the universal and the particular, the event in which the eternal and universal principles of reason and justice interrupted the flow of history by manifesting themselves in a set of human actors in a specific time and place.

The crisis of authority gave rise to a similar contradiction in the efforts of the Republic to manipulate the identity of its citizens, styling itself a transcendent Other that can guarantee the existence of its members in order to gain legitimacy and obedience while indoctrinating them at the same time with the conviction that the democratic State is a manifestation of themselves as autonomous, self-governing beings: in short, that they are the State. As a result, the educational project of the Republic provoked a predicament of representation similar to the one which occurred simultaneously in the realm of literature, and for much the same reasons. In this dual crisis of representation and identity, the opposing parties enlisted fiction in their polemical campaigns.
APPENDIX A

Chronology of Historical, Intellectual, and Literary Events

1774 Johann Gottfried Herder, Another Philosophy of History Concerning the Development of Mankind

1788 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason

1789, French Revolution

1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

1792–1804, First Republic

1790 Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event


1800 Louis de Bonald, Analytical Essay on the Natural Laws of the Social Order

1804–14/15, First Empire

1806 Creation of the Université, national administration of all secondary and higher education
1814/15–30 Restoration of Bourbon Monarchy
1814 Joseph de Maistre, *Essay on the Generating Principle of Political Constitutions*

1830–48, July Monarchy
1830–42 Auguste Comte, founder of positivism, *Course on Positive Philosophy* (6 volumes)

1848–51, Second Republic
1848 Comte, *A General View of Positivism*
1848 Charles Renouvier, *Republican Manual of Man and of the Citizen*
1848 Ernest Renan, *The Future of Science* (first published in 1890)
1850 Edgar Quinet, *The Education of the People*
1850 Falloux laws giving control of education to Catholic Church

1851–70, Second Empire
1858 Proudhon, *On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*
1860 Étienne Vacherot, *Democracy*
1865–70 *La Morale Indépendante*, Alexandre Massol, journal editor
1866 Ligue de l’enseignement founded by Jean Macé
1869 Clarisse Coignet, *Independent Morality in Its Principle and Its Object*
1870 Jules Ferry gives Salle Molière speech, April 10
1870 Hippolyte Taine, *On Intelligence*
1870 Théodule Ribot, *Contemporary English Psychology*
1870–71 Franco-German War

1870–1940, Third Republic
1871 Paris Commune, March–May
1871 Founding of the neo-Kantian journal *La Critique Philosophique*, Renouvier & François Pillon, editors
1871 Gambetta campaign speech in Bordeaux, June 26
1874 Émile Boutroix, On the Contingency of the Laws of Nature
1875 Republican Constitution
1875, 1876 Ferry gives speeches to Freemasons
1875 Renouvier, *Short Treatise on Morals for Use in Laic Primary Schools*
1876 Jules Vallès, *Les réfractaires*
1876–94 Taine, *The Origins of Contemporary France*
1877 French translation of Eduard Hartmann’s *Philosophy of the Unconscious*
1877 Republican majority in Chamber of Deputies
1878 Vallès, *The Child*, first volume of Jacques Vingtras trilogy
1880 *Evenings at Médan*, Émile Zola editor of collection of naturalist short stories
1880 Zola, *The Experimental Novel*, manifesto of naturalist literature
1882 Republican majority in Senate
1880–82 Jules Ferry, minister of public education, introduces laws establishing obligatory, free, and laic primary schools; Camille Sée introduces laws establishing public secondary schools for girls
1881 Founding of École Normale Supérieure for women at Sèvres, first director Mme. Jules Favre
1882 Renan, *What Is a Nation?*
1882 Paul Bert, *Civics Education in the Schools*
1883 Ferry, *Letter to Primary Schoolteachers*
1883 Elme Caro, *Monsieur Littré and Positivism*
1883 Ferdinand Brunetière, *The Naturalist Novel*
1883 Death of Henri Dieudonné, the Count de Chambord, last of the Bourbons
1885 Death of Victor Hugo (born in 1802)
1886 Octave Feuillet, *Aliette*
1886–89  Boulangist threat to the Republic
1883  Paul Bourget, *Essays in Contemporary Psychology*
1885  Bourget, *New Essays in Contemporary Psychology*
1886  Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, *The Russian Novel*
1887  *The Manifesto of the Five*, attack on Zola and his novel *Earth*
1889  Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*
1889  Bourget, *The Disciple*
1887  Wilson scandal, Daniel Wilson, son-in-law of Jules Grévy, president of the Republic, accused of selling state honors
1888–91  Maurice Barrès, *Cult of the Ego* trilogy
1892  Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical calling for French Church to rally to Republic
1893  Founding of the new spiritualist journal, *Rue de Métaphysique et de Morale*
1894  Eugène Spuller, minister of public education, fine arts and cults calls for “New Spirit” of reconciliation with Church
1892–93  Panama Canal scandal; legislators accused of taking graft to support financing of canal
1895  Brunetière, “After a Visit to the Vatican”
1896–98  Méline president of the Council of Ministers
1897  Anatole France, *The Elm-Tree on the Mall*, and *The Wicker Work Woman*, first two volumes of *Contemporary History*
1897  Barrès, *The Uprooted*, first volume of *The Novel of National Energy*
1897–1900  Dreyfus Affair (see appendix B)
1898  Spanish-American War
1899  France, *The Amethyst Ring*, third volume of *Contemporary History*
1899  Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau president of the Council of Ministers
1899–1900  Policy of Appeasement
1900  World’s Fair in Paris
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>France, <em>Monsieur Bergeret in Paris</em>, Book Four of <em>Contemporary History</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Émile Zola, <em>La vérité en marche</em>, collection of articles about Dreyfus Affair</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Barrès, <em>Appeal to the Soldier</em>, second volume of <em>The Novel of National Energy</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Zola, <em>Truth</em> (published posthumously)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Bourget, <em>L'étape</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Barrès, <em>Their Faces</em>, third volume of <em>The Novel of National Energy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Barrès, <em>Scenes and Doctrines of Nationalism</em></td>
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<td>1905</td>
<td>Émile Combes’s laws separating Church and State</td>
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Main Participants

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Esterhazy</td>
<td>The actual traitor, author of the memo (bordereau) used as main evidence proving Dreyfus's guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Henry</td>
<td>Military intelligence, forged a note indicating Dreyfus's guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General de Pellieux</td>
<td>Directed inquiry into Esterhazy’s involvement that absolved him of any guilt; witness at Zola’s trial, designated Henry forgery as ‘absolute proof’ of Dreyfus’s guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Du Paty de Clam</td>
<td>Military intelligence, examining magistrate in Dreyfus’s initial court-martial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General de Boisdefire</td>
<td>Chief of staff at beginning of Dreyfus Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Gonse</td>
<td>Deputy chief of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Mercier</td>
<td>Minister of war at the beginning of Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonel Sandherr</td>
<td>Head of military intelligence at beginning of Affair, intercepted bordereau sent to German military attaché, Schwartzkoppen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Alfred Dreyfus</td>
<td>Accused of passing military secrets to the Germans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathieu Dreyfus</td>
<td>Alfred’s older brother, worked tirelessly to clear his name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Major (Lieutenant-Colonel) Picquart | Replaced Colonel Sandherr as head of military intelligence, defended Dreyfus to his fellow officers, imprisoned, career ruined

Auguste Scheurer-Kestner | Vice president of the Senate, defended Dreyfus’s innocence, brought case before Parliament

Bernard Lazare | Anarchist, waged a campaign in the papers and among intellectuals to prove Dreyfus’s innocence

**Chronology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 15, 1894</td>
<td>Dreyfus, identified as author of <em>bordereau</em> (letter to German military attaché Schwartzkoppen announcing dispatch of secret military documents), is arrested for spying for the German government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1, 1894</td>
<td><em>La Libre Parole</em>, anti-Semitic newspaper, names Dreyfus as traitor</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 19–22, 1894</td>
<td>Dreyfus is court-martialed, found guilty of treason, sentenced to deportation for life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 5, 1895</td>
<td>Military degradation of Dreyfus</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 13, 1895</td>
<td>Dreyfus is placed in prison on Devil’s Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1896</td>
<td>Major Picquart discovers <em>petit bleu</em> (message from German embassy to Esterhazy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 6, 1896</td>
<td>Picquart is promoted to lieutenant-colonel</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1896</td>
<td>Picquart discovers that Esterhazy wrote <em>bordereau</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Autumn 1896</td>
<td><em>L’Éclair</em> and <em>Le Matin</em>, large-circulation newspapers, draw attention to supposed proofs of Dreyfus’s guilt; Bernard Lazare circulates his document about Dreyfus’s innocence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 26, 1896</td>
<td>Picquart is ordered to duty in North Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 1896</td>
<td>Henry hands forged letter, ‘proving’ Dreyfus’s guilt, to General Gonse</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 6, 1896</td>
<td>Bernard-Lazare publishes his pamphlet, <em>A Judicial Error</em>, in Brussels</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1896</td>
<td>Henry adds more forged documents to Dreyfus’s file</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 18, 1897</td>
<td>Picquart writes letter of protest to Major Henry</td>
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June 29, 1897  Picquart gives his material to his lawyer, Maître Leblois

July 13–14, 1897  Leblois shows Picquart’s material to Scheurer-Kestner, vice president of the Senate, who then informs his colleagues that he thinks Dreyfus innocent

Autumn 1897  Esterhazy and general staff—Gonse, Henry, and du Paty under the protection of General de Boisdefre—conspire to avoid his conviction; Esterhazy writes three letters to the president of Republic accusing Picquart of forging the petit bleu

November 16, 1897  Mathieu Dreyfus publishes his accusations against Esterhazy in Le Figaro

January 11, 1898  Esterhazy is acquitted at the court-martial he requested

January 13, 1898  Zola’s “J’accuse” is published in Clemenceau’s L’Aurore; Picquart is arrested and imprisoned

February 23, 1898  Zola is convicted of libel in criminal court (Cour d’Assises)

February 26, 1898  Picquart is dismissed from the army

April 2, 1898  The Cour de Cassation (Supreme Court of Appeal) annuls Zola’s conviction

May 23, 1898  Zola is retried by court-martial at Versailles

July 7, 1898  Minister of War Cavaignac reads out supposed proofs against Dreyfus, thus precipitating rebuttals and exposure of Henry’s forgeries

July 12, 1898  Esterhazy is placed under arrest

July 13, 1898  Picquart is arrested and prosecuted

July 18–19, 1898  Zola is convicted once again; he flees to England

August 13, 1898  Henry’s forgery is discovered

August 31–September 1, 1898  Major Henry’s arrest and suicide; Esterhazy is dishonorably discharged from army, flees from France; General de Boisdefre resigns

June 3, 1899  The Cour de Cassation sets aside conviction of 1894, leading to new court-martial in Rennes

June 5, 1899  Zola returns to France
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<tr>
<td>June 9, 1899</td>
<td>Dreyfus leaves Guiana; Picquart is exonerated and freed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 9, 1899</td>
<td>Once again, Dreyfus is convicted of treason</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 19, 1899</td>
<td>President Loubet signs pardon of Dreyfus</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2, 1900</td>
<td>Senate votes general amnesty, which takes effect</td>
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<td></td>
<td>December 27, 1900</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 12, 1906</td>
<td>The Cour de Cassation sets aside Rennes conviction, thus clearing Dreyfus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 13, 1906</td>
<td>Dreyfus and Picquart are reinstated in army; Dreyfus is promoted to major, Picquart to general</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

1. Ferry was already Minister of Public Education and retained that portfolio when he was named Président du Conseil des ministres in December 1880.

2. See my “Education and Political Identity: The Universalist Controversy” for a more comprehensive review of the literature that follows.

3. All translations from the French in this book are my own, unless otherwise specified.

4. I refer specifically to the production of literary texts that offer representations of the questions of pedagogical theory and practice. For the teaching of literature in the schools, see Ralph Albanese, Molière à l’École républicaine and La Fontaine à l’École républicaine, and M. Martin Guiney, Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic.

5. Bourget is referring here to the tradition of British philosophy and psychology going back to Locke and especially to Hume and his popularizer Hartley, as well as to their nineteenth-century followers such as Mill, Bain, and Spencer. Théodule Ribot’s La psychologie anglaise contemporaine, first published in 1870, was the main source in French for information about this trend, along with Taine’s attempted fusion of Hegelian thought with positivism, De l’intelligence, also of 1870, in which he adopted Mill’s view of the self as nothing more than the series of its states. It was Ribot, however, who became the leading authority in France on the new experimental psychology in the latter third of the century.

6. Earlier in the century, critics and writers spoke of ‘novels with a thesis.’ It was only at the end of the century that the term roman à thèse became the name of a sub-genre.

7. In 1902, Bourget published a second novel of education designed, like Zola’s Truth, to draw the lessons allegedly taught by the Dreyfus Affair, titled L’Etape (see Charle, Paris fin de siècle 201–26, for a comparison of Bourget’s novel with Zola’s Truth). While the book shows the changes in Bourget’s politics since 1889, it adds little to his interpretation of the flaws in republican education or the latter’s effect on national identity; hence my decision not to include an analysis of it in my text.
8. In his comparison of *Vérité* and *L’Étage*, Charle points out that recent scholarship has shown that the Republic was actually quite stable at the time, and he argues that the crisis actually occurred in the field of the intellectuals rather than in the nation at large (*Paris fin de siècle* 213–15). As the present-day division between red and blue states in the United States illustrates, however, it is quite possible for the members of a nation to feel they are in crisis, even though the government is stable. And the millions of readers whom the popular press—*Le Petit Journal* and the various regional versions of *La Croix*, especially—whipped up into a frenzy of anti-Semitism during the Affair were certainly not all intellectuals; on the contrary.

9. Throughout the decades bracketing the turn of the century, a public debate raged in France over the role of the “intellectual” as educator, a category that included professors and journalists as well as novelists (see Charle, *Naissance des intellectuels*; and Datta, *Birth of a National Icon*).

**Chapter 1**

1. Actually, with the exception of the crucial elections of the National Assembly in 1871, the republicans had been steadily gaining ground over their opponents since the latter days of the Second Empire, and had held majorities in both houses at various times before the dates mentioned (see J.-M. Mayeur, chaps. 1–2).

2. In reference to nineteenth-century Catholicism, the term “liberal” designates the wing of the French Church that accepted the Concordat treaty, which placed the Church hierarchy under the rule of French law and allowed the existence of other religions, thus rejecting the dogma that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church. In politics, these were Orléanists, supporters of the monarchical pretensions of the Count of Paris and the rule of the traditional, or “dynastic,” bourgeoisie that had reigned supreme during the July Monarchy (1830–1848).

3. Church hostility to the Republic lasted well beyond the publication of the encyclical. At the same time, many Catholics saw the call for *ralliement* as the Church’s capitulation to Enlightenment ideology.

4. Under the Falloux laws, primary schoolteachers had to submit to the involvement of priests in their classes, were forced to serve as cantors or sacristans in the local churches, and had to teach catechism classes (Compagnon and Thévenin).

5. See Phyllis Stock-Morton’s *Moral Education for a Secular Society* for a comprehensive history of the development of what was alternately called ‘social morality,’ ‘independent morality,’ or ‘laic morality.’ Stock-Morton rightly observes that the vital link between Condorcet and Quinet was the philosopher and minister of public instruction under the July Monarchy, Victor Cousin, whose separation of ethics from religion was the basis for all later arguments about independent morality and its teaching in the schools (29–40).

6. This was a change from Comte’s earlier position in the *Cours de philosophie positive*, where he argued that it is unnecessary to teach morality in a separate course, since it would result naturally from the eventual victory of positivism in the public mind and from the teaching of sociology (Legrand 29–30).

7. This biographical information on Coignet is taken from the summary of a study by Janine Joliot on file in the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand in Paris.

8. See Désiré Nolen, “Kant et la philosophie du dix-neuvième siècle” (cited in Di- geon, 335 n2). Stock-Morton declares that “although Durkheim completed the theoretical development of *morale laïque*, we must conclude that the last moral philosophy actually accepted by the French for use in education was that of Renouvier” (173).
9. Digeon mentions a host of writers who maintain that, for better or for worse, Kantianism dominated the Third Republic and its schools—A. Cresson, La morale de Kant (1897; cited in 334 n2); Victor Basch (cited in 334 n2, itself a citation from Maurras’s Quand les Français ne s’aimaient pas), as well as L. Daudet, Julien Benda, and Abel Hermant.

Digeon also refers to many writers who attacked Kantianism—Th. Funck-Brentano; Barrès, of course; Fouillée; and especially members of l’Action française, such as H. Vaugeois (336 n2).

10. In 1806 Napoleon established the Conseil de l’Université, an institution designed to organize and govern all secondary as well as higher education in France. In nineteenth-century texts and common parlance the term ‘Université’ most often designated the public secondary schools (see, for instance, Daudet’s widely read novel Le petit chose [1868], in which the hero goes to work for the Université as a monitor in a collège).

11. For a representative overview of their ideas about morality and education, see Steeg, Buisson, and Pécaut. See also Mona Ozouf 87. In accord with the general thesis of Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic, that Republican education imitated the Catholic education it sought to overthrow, Guiney contends that the education they instituted owed little to Protestantism; on the contrary, it came to resemble the Catholic education they were replacing (86–88). My point here is simply that the notion of morality they introduced into the schools was heavily influenced by Kantian ideas.

12. Guiney provides ample evidence for the view that the calls for teaching either Latin or literature in the secondary schools were based on the claim that these topics conferred a moral sense on the students through their apprenticeship and appreciation of form rather than content; the cultivation of “taste” was thus both moral and national, in the sense of imbuing pupils with the appreciation of specifically “French” style. This is summed up in Fouillée’s pronouncement: “Considered philosophically, grammar has its own morality” (quoted on p. 180).

13. There is some dispute as to Boutroux’s impact on Bergson. Parodi, Chevalier, and Scharfstein assert the importance of Boutroux’s thesis for the development of Bergson’s ideas; others, such as Barthélemy-Madaule in her Bergson, deny it any significant role, relying on Bergson’s airy dismissal of Boutroux’s teaching as being too Kantian (Barthélemy-Madaule 8–9). On the other hand, it is clear that Boutroux’s admiring pupil Durkheim adopted his professor’s basic mode of reasoning in giving precedence to the social over the individual in Les règles de la méthode sociologique (1895). Stock-Morton summarizes the argument as follows: “just as the chemical properties of atoms were insufficient to account for physiological phenomena, so the nature of individuals was insufficient to explain social phenomena” (131).

14. In thus combating rationalistic natural science by linking contingency and freedom to the notion of a voluntaristic God, Boutroux was reviving a tradition which goes back to the thirteenth century, when Bishop Étienne Tempier declared the principles of Averroism, i.e., Aristotelian rationalist philosophy and science, to be heretical (see Gilson). A more immediate predecessor was Jules Lachelier, who argued in his thesis, Du Fondement de l’induction, that all causality is subordinate to purpose and therefore to contingency. Bergson stated that he considered Lachelier to be his teacher even though he never took a course with him, so great was the effect of reading Fondement while at the rue d’Ulm (Bergson, Essais et témoignages 358).

15. On the level of epistemology, despite his reputed “irrationalism,” Bergson’s main objection to Kant was the latter’s restriction of scientific knowledge to phenomena, whereas for Bergson, as for the spiritualist realism of Ravaisson, “the mathematical and physical sciences tend to reveal reality in itself, absolute reality” (quoted in Scharfstein 134).
16. Recall, for instance, Renan’s harangue against democracy in *La réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France* as the antithesis of rationality because it represents the triumph of number, “that is, of stupidity and spinelessness” (Digeon 197).

17. Irvin Edman, in his foreword to the Modern Library edition of *Creative Evolution* (1944); Zeev Sternhell, in *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français* (1983); and Anna Boschetti, in *Sartre et “Les Temps Modernes,* all document Bergson’s adoption by the political right, even while they skirt the claim that the philosopher himself drew the political conclusions the right attributed to him (see Chaitin, “From the Third Republic to Postmodernism” 783–85). See also R. C. Grogin (85–88).

18. In another textbook, *Livre de lecture et de morale* (1894), Émile Devinat has the children recite the following lesson titled “You love your country”: “I love France, my country, because its inhabitants are my brothers, children of the same race, with the same blood and the same ancestors. . . . France is my mother: in my heart there will never be anything above her” (83).

19. This substitution was not complete, however. Despite the complaints of Catholic critics about the vagueness of the religious content of the courses on morals and civics (see numerous articles in *La Réforme Sociale*, e.g., de Metz Noblat, “L’instruction civique à l’école d’après G. Compayré”), most primary schoolteachers and authors of textbooks in the 1880s and 1890s were, as Ferry pointed out to Parliament, believers of some sort, and they included specific references to God in their teachings (Katan 421–22). The only significant function of the God taught in the schools, however, was to guarantee the physical order of the universe, the moral order of the self, and hence the social order of the human world. Thus, even when this conception of divinity was retained, it easily merged into the purely secular versions of independent morality (Steeg, *Cours de morale*; Buisson, *La religion, la morale et la science*; Rauh, *Psychologie appliquée à la morale et à l’éducation*; *Cours de morale à l’usage des jeunes filles*; Katan 425).

20. In *Molière à l’École républicaine* and *La Fontaine à l’École républicaine,* Albanese details many of the ways the schools of the Third Republic attempted to use the study of the so-called classics to inculcate in their pupils a sense of national identity and unanimity (*Molière* 4–6); and to teach them the morals that undergirded the regime’s claims to legitimacy (*La Fontaine* 100).

21. Anderson in fact notes, in a general way, the coincidence of the rise of nationalism with the weakening of religion in Europe and points out that the nation serves the same purposes as religion (18–19).

**Chapter 2**

1. All references to *The Disciple* are to the anonymous T. Fisher Unwin translation, reprinted by Howard Fertig Publishing. I have occasionally modified the translation after comparison with the French.


3. The notion of a theory of the subject goes back of course to Descartes, Kant, and especially Hegel, but in nineteenth-century France it was Littré who bemoaned the lack of an empirical theory of the subject in Comte’s philosophy; an omission he set out to remedy (Caro, *M. Littré et le positivisme* 125, citing Littré’s *Auguste Comte et la philosophie positive*).

4. The French term *revanchard* indicates anyone who aims to take revenge, especially for a military defeat. It was used extensively after the defeat by Prussia in 1870–71 to refer to militaristic French patriots intent on recovering the lost provinces of Alsace and
Lorraine from the Germans. In the novel, Count André is considered a hero for having participated in the war and killed a German soldier.

5. In fact, Greslou compares himself to Faust (147, 172). It should be pointed out that ‘pity for human suffering’ was enjoying a great vogue at the time in France, contributing to the popularity of George Eliot (just after her death) along with that of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë, and especially of the Russian novel starting with the translation of Crime and Punishment in 1884, as well as the publication of several critical studies preceding and including Vogüé’s Roman russe (Mansuy 429–30).

6. Like Goethe’s Charlottes, both the fictional and the real one, Chambige’s mistress was also an “older” woman who was married and had children. From the biographical perspective, Bourget’s Charlotte can be seen as a replacement for Chambige’s maternal Mme. Grille.

Chapter 3

1. These novels have not been translated into English. All translations are mine.

2. Barrès announced a study of contemporary nihilism—by which he meant the poets Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud—in the initial issue of Taches d’encre (1884), the first magazine he edited as a young man in Paris. Bourget had just made the term stylish in his Essais of 1883. In succeeding years, the word became a commonplace among writers and intellectuals. Édouard Rod makes Renan the great priest of nothingness (du néant) in his Idées morales du temps présent (1891) (73). Théophile Funck-Brentano, a professor at the recently created École des Sciences Politiques, wrote a book titled Les sophistes allemands et les nihilistes russes (1887), in which he blames all the ills of “Western civilization,” by which he means every movement dedicated to the modification or overthrow of the political status quo in Europe, on Kant and his successors. As early as 1799, the German theologian and philosopher F. H. Jacobi had labeled Kant’s philosophy “nihilism” in a letter to Fichte.

3. A more distant source of these ideas is found in Barrès’s reading, at the age of sixteen, of an article about the “young Hegelians” by Saint-René Taillandier in the Revue des Deux Mondes of July 15, 1847. “The Ego of Max Stirner” eliminates “everything that is not the ego” (261). “I alone exist, I alone, outside of myself I can know nothing and believe nothing” (258–59). Stirner, he says, “boldly preaches the religion of the ego,” “celebrates egoism as the only form of complete freedom” (264; quoted in Frandon, Barrès précurseur 54). “No more God, no more human race, no more homeland, nothing outside my being any more, not a general idea, not an absolute principle” (70). The same article condemns the young Hegelians’ “exaltation in nothingness” (262).

4. At least, so Barrès seems to imply. In fact, the model for Bouteiller, Auguste Burdeau, was born in 1851. In 1859, when he turned eight, France was still under the Second Empire. Since Bouteiller, like Burdeau, fought and was wounded in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, his early education could hardly have been carried out under the Third Republic. No doubt Barrès would reply, with Taine, that ever since its institution under the first Napoleon, the University had been an instrument of centralization and deracination (see the last completed volume of Taine’s Origines, titled L’école).

5. Sternhell points out, however, that Barrès’s admiration for Soury dates at least from 1888 (M. Barrès et le nationalisme français 256; see “La jeunesse boulangiste,” Le Figaro, May 19, 1888). In her Orient de Maurice Barrès, Frandon argues plausibly that in fact Barrès started attending Soury’s lectures as early as 1886 (39; also 378 n7).
Chapter 4

1. This image of Jewish immigrants recalls the fact that large numbers of poor, working-class, ghetto Jews fleeing the pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe had settled in France in the 1880s and 1890s. If the anti-Semitic literature of the period is any judge (e.g., Renan; Drumont), they appeared much more alien to the French than those from Alsace (Wilson, Bernard Lazare 75–76). Bernard Lazare himself, during his early anti-Semitic period, exclaimed: “Open an anti-Semitic book at random, and you will hear people cry out, for good reason usually, against the Frankfurters, the Galicians, the Rumanians, the Russians, who are swooping down onto our country like locusts” (“La solidarité juive,” Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires (October 1890), quoted in Bredin, Bernard Lazare 110). Barrès seems to be assimilating the two groups in order to compound revanchism with anti-Semitism.

2. The elements in Frege’s set are those things that are identical to themselves; everything real presumably. The empty set contains those things which are not identical to themselves, i.e., nothing, which is why it is empty. But if it contains nothing, nevertheless it is itself something, a signifier, a set, the first element in that other set, the series of integers; it is the zero term that acts as the starting point necessary to launch the infinite series.

3. Strictly speaking, this should be termed a ‘hypnotic’ rather than a transferential theory, according to Freud’s analysis in Group Psychology and Ego Analysis. Likewise, Barrès’s fiction should be classified as hypnotic rather than transferential narrative, since the speaker (the hypnotist) is the authority rather than the listener (the psychoanalyst) (see Chaitin, “Psychoanalysis and Narrative Action” 284–301, 293–94). It is Lacan’s notion of the analyst as the “subject supposed to know,” developed in his 1964 seminar on The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, which Felman then elaborated into a theory of narrative in which it is the storyteller, or the author, who becomes the object of the reader’s transference, in “Turning the Screw of Interpretation.” Lacan himself, however, reverted in 1967 to something closer to the Freudian idea, claiming that the true subject supposed to know(ledge) was the analysand, not the analyst (see Chaitin, Lacan and the Rhetoric of Culture chap. 5). I have retained the term ‘transference,’ nevertheless, since, in the last analysis, for both Freud and Lacan the transference is a kind of spell that must be broken in order to attain a degree of mental health and autonomy.

Chapter 5

1. Scholars generally give one of two reasons for this interruption: either France wanted to downplay France’s opposition to the Church during his candidacy for the Académie Française (which was successful), or he was distracted by the trips he took at the time to Italy and the North Sea (Levaillant 442; Bancquart, “Notice” to Contemporary History 1321; Sachs 118). Bancquart adds a third possibility: France simply could not see how to organize his individual scenes into a larger whole, on the one hand, and, on the other, his characters were so closely related to each other that he could not separate them into discrete short stories (“Notice” 1324).

2. In many ways, these arguments constituted a reprise of those Brunetièr had brought forth in the dispute over The Disciple, in which he and France had locked horns half a decade before. It is more than a little ironic, then, that neither one of them realized at the time that Bourget’s main intention in that novel was precisely to allow for
the conciliation of science and religion via Spencer’s ‘unknowable’ (see chap. 2 in this volume; see also Levaillant 291–98).

3. As France well knew, Brunetière was far from being the sole perpetrator of these ideas. Levaillant refers to a series of Church publications and doctrines, especially a recent encyclical distinguishing theological from scientific truths aimed at eliminating scientific textual biblical criticism, and which, presumably, a well-informed contemporary reader would have recognized (473–74).

4. In November 1897, France published two articles—one in L’Aurore, the other in the Écho de Paris (the latter adapted from Amethyst)—questioning the judgment against Dreyfus (Bancquart 228).

5. This was the standard argument of the anarchists, at that time and even after 1905, when they judged that the experiment in mass education represented by the Ferry reforms of primary education had been a failure: “Look at the anarchists, who see the French as a spineless, mindless, submissive, indifferent mass. The artisan of this cowardly resignation is of course the schoolteacher, that champion of conformism who has replaced, and even ‘surpassed his religious rival’ (it’s le Libertaire of October 1909)” (J. Ozouf).

6. In her “Notice” to the first two volumes of Contemporary History, Bancquart tries to assess France’s attitude toward the Jews before the Dreyfus Affair, given the negative portraits he paints of Worms-Clavelin and his wife, who, unlike the other caricatures in the book, have no redeeming qualities. She argues that the prefect is really very antipathetic, like the Jewish bankers of Maupassant and Zola, even though all three were opposed in principle to anti-Semitism (1343–44). She attributes this to a ‘diffuse’ anti-Semitism, “wariness, a sense of difference,” combined out of the prosperity and visibility of the well-known Jewish financiers, plus the inclusion of numerous Jews in the government and civil service since the rise of the ‘republic of the republicans,’ and their support of the Opportunists, who gave them much greater freedom than in other regimes and other countries (1345). Bancquart concludes that France really did feel hostility toward Jews, especially those who renounced their own heritage, but that he was nevertheless opposed to anti-Semitism. See Pierre Birnbaum’s Les fous de la République (translated as The Jews of the Republic) for a comprehensive history of the Jews who participated in the government during the Third Republic and the anti-Semitic reaction of the period. Birnbaum gives detailed information about Ernest Hendlé, the prefect who came to symbolize the Jewish republican prefect capable of entertaining good relations with the Church hierarchy and whom France took as model for his Worms-Clavelin (32–33).

In her “Notice” to Amethyst, Bancquart points out that, with the onset of the Affair, France dropped Worms-Clavelin and transferred his satire onto the rich capitalist Jewish converts to Catholicism, Mme. de Bonmont and her family (1156).

It should be noted that in Amethyst, at the height of the Affair, France makes a point of debunking the anti-Semites’ racist claim that “Jews and Frenchmen cannot live together. The antagonism is ineradicable, it is in the blood,” as M. de Terremondre puts it—to which M. Bergeret responds that the Jews are the most adaptable people on earth and that “the daughters of our Jewish financiers marry nowadays the heirs to the greatest names in Christian France” (142), admittedly a typical double-barreled critique of both groups.

7. Needless to say, anarchists like Adolphe Retté and younger readers such as Adrien Chevalier, Georges Rodenbach, and Léon Blum were delighted by the same qualities. Retté notes with glee that France “demolishes present-day society by undermining: the army, the administration, the clergy, not to mention the family” (“M. Anatole France: L’orne du mail,” La Plume 8 [1897]: 251ff.; cited in Gier 229); Blum heartily approved

Chapter 6

1. I should add that it is not just the women who display this venality and lack of principle. It occurs to Mme. de Bonmont’s son that he should try to make Guitrel a bishop in order to be invited to the Duc de Brécé’s prestigious hunts. He thinks of Loyer, minister of public education and churches, who therefore appoints bishops and whom he thinks he can influence via Mme. de Gromance. He meets Gustave (later called Philippe) Dellion, son of one of the leading aristocratic families of their home town (Dellion’s wife used to be Mme. Bergeret’s defender), and who owes Bonmont a lot of money. Gustave is Mme. de Gromance’s lover, which is why Bonmont is unaccustomedly nice to him. Bonmont asks him to ask Mme. de Gromance to ask Loyer to make abbé Guitrel Bishop of Tourcoing, more or less promising to buy an automobile for Dellion if he succeeds. This imbroglio is meant of course to illustrate the absurdity of the chain of causes leading to Guitrel’s appointment as bishop, in the manner of Voltaire’s Candide.

2. There are several passages in Paris about Riquet’s defense of the premises against the interloper, in which M. Bergeret makes the dog out to be a member of the anti-Dreyfus crowd (as Levaillant points out, 252). But then his master recognizes Riquet’s virtues, such as goodness and protection of the household. Above all, Riquet/the people is governed by fear, the age-old gods of fear and violence; and ignorance.

3. In his reception speech to the Académie Française in 1841, Victor Hugo distinguished the peuple from the populace and then from the foule. The latter became traditional in the ideology of the left and was often invoked during the Dreyfus Affair to explain away the contradiction between the appeal to the people and the reality of the masses’ violence and anti-Semitism. Cf. Séverine, “La Foule” for the identical argument distinguishing between the good, robust ‘people’ and the evil ‘crowd.’

4. Cassaing (303) cites several contributors to Clemenceau’s organ, L’Aurore:

Clemenceau: “What we need to change, to reform, is the sovereign people. . . . We must educate our master with a thousand heads.”

Gustave Geoffroy: “How can we conquer this crowd? . . . Everything shows us that the problem to be solved is that of educating this crowd, helping it to conquer its right to life, to a complete life, to a life of the body and a life of the mind.” (emphasis in original)

And of course, Zola, as we will see in the following chapter.

Levaillant gives a similar quote, from Emile Duclaux: “[If we suffer from this type of crisis,] it’s only because people lack critical sense and the masses have not been educated”; [therefore we must cooperate] on the rational education of people’s minds” (525, n180).

5. Just as Spinoza’s God is immanent in the universe—is all beings, rather than an independent entity, source of all being, outside of or beyond the universe—so the communist State dissolves into the set of all the people that constitute society. Interestingly enough, M. Bergeret cites Spinoza immediately before the passage quoted, but in reference to an apparently totally different topic—that intellect and comprehension often hinder action.

6. M. Bergeret seeks this ideal in the quintessential representative of the goodness of the people, Pied-d’Alouette. He returns to this theme in relation to himself after the
departure of his wife, when he feels “unmoved by either love or hate” (Wicker Work Woman 129). In the subsequent volume, he comes upon Mme. de Gromance in the street and is delighted to find that, although he knows she will never be his, “he was not sad, because his wisdom approached the happy state of ataraxy, without, however, finally attaining it” (Amethyst 114–15).

7. In reality, Anatole France devoted much time and energy to launching these universities, for he believed that by teaching science and economics to the working classes, they could become the instrument for changing bourgeois society into a society of social justice (Bancquart, “Notice” to M. Bergeret à Paris 1216).

Chapter 7

1. All references to Truth are from the Livre de Poche edition, which is the most accessible and has the best critical apparatus. In a few cases, I have corrected obvious typos by comparing the text to that of the François Bernouard edition. References to the Livre de Poche edition will be marked by the letter V in italics. An English translation is available (see bibliography), which I have consulted, but it has so many omissions and inaccuracies that I prefer to use my own translations.

2. Cassaing argues most convincingly that Zola espoused the line of Clemenceau and the Aurore team, that the secularization of education must precede political and economic reform, against the conciliatory stance taken by Jaurès and his socialist party toward the Waldeck-Rousseau government (303).

3. Zola repeats this point almost verbatim in the text of the novel: “[Marc harbored] regret for not having been able to draw an admirable object lesson from this prodigious Simon Affair, one which would have taught the people. . . . In a few months, the Simon Affair would have done more to emancipate the people and to establish the reign of justice than a hundred years of ardent politics” (quoted in Cassaing 302).

As for the idea of the people’s ‘infection,’ in his review of Truth in the Revue mondiale of February 15, 1903, Georges Pellissier had already observed that the Simon Affair was just an episode that brought to light “all the deep, latent infection hidden in the soul of a people odiously deprived of thought by ignorance, vitiated by prejudice and fanaticism” (480–81).

4. “I know that it [knowledge] alone makes people capable of justice. Everywhere the bourgeoisie is educated and how it acts in keeping everything. So knowledge is not enough, you have to be brought up right, have morals” (Zola’s preparatory notes, quoted in Laville 221).


6. In The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, Lacan points out that the correlative of the Freudian subject is the deceived Other; that is, the fear that the Other can be deceived and therefore will not understand the meaning of his or her symptom (233).

A custom that persisted in France even after World War II, according to Jules Isaac: “To those who deplored Auschwitz and the fate of innocent Jewish victims, how many times has a Christian responded: ‘What do you expect, they are an accursed people [un people maudit]’” (L’antisémitisme a-t-il des racines chrétiennes? 36).

8. In his “Letter to the Senate,” Zola wrote: “The most serious, the most painful thing is that they have allowed the country to be poisoned by the vile press that has im- pudently gorged it on lies, calumnies, filth and outrages, to the point of driving it mad” (La vérité en marche 138).
9. At the height of the Dreyfus Affair, La Croix published calls to violence: “Eviscerate him” [apropos of Zola]; “All this will end badly for them [the Jews] . . . If the police and government remain powerless, the citizens in their disgust will have to mete out justice themselves” (Sorlin 120). And to cap it all off, Sorlin writes:

The issue of 21 July [1898] reproduces, filling an entire page in bold-face type, a poster published by the Committee on Justice-Equality of Montpellier . . . Judas Dreyfus sold out France

The Jews have grabbed everything, dirtied everything, destroyed everything

The Jews are turning France upside down for the greater profit of worldwide Kikedom.

Let us unite to turn Jewish omnipotence upside down and kick the Jews out of [France] (120; emphasis in original).

Moreover, it would seem as though the Assumptionists’ efforts met with a certain degree of success, since, according to modern scholars, two anti-Semitic masons, unable to disembowel Zola, had to settle for murdering him by stuffing up his chimney and asphyxiating him (see Bedel; Mitterand, Olympia 93; Brown 23–25).

10. The idea of the indelible imprint left upon a woman by her first lover is, of course, the Michelet theory from L’amour et la femme that Zola used as the thesis of his early novel, Madeleine Férat (1868).

11. In this respect, then, Truth is the answer to Michelet and Madeleine Férat, rather than their repetition.

12. In a sense, Zola had always espoused a kind of Lamarckian theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, since the descendants on the Macquart side of the family inherit their destructive tendencies from their immediate forebears: Étienne Lantier, for example, inherits the alcoholism of his mother, Gervaise. The difference in Truth is that, perhaps in response to the current nationalist ideology of the soil and the dead, Zola extends the range of operation of heredity to include the entire nation and its past from the beginnings to present. Zola uses the language of writing when he has Geneviève protest that in her the hereditary flaw seems to be “indelible” (V 493).

Chapter 8

1. Marc’s conviction about the identity of the real criminal is just as independent of the evidence as his reasons for refusing to believe in the guilt of the fathers. Even after receiving the piece of evidence that clinches the guilt of Brother Gorgias, he insists that reason alone can determine the truth: “All the facts illuminated each other, they all led to the same conclusion. Even outside the material evidence that they were beginning to possess, there was a certainty like the demonstration of a mathematical problem, which reasoning alone was sufficient to solve” (I: 302, 311).

Like his adversaries then, Marc judges the world by his ideas, his representation of it. His relation to phenomena is every bit as ‘subjective’ as that of his opponents, in the sense that it depends on mental constructs, even though it is not the least bit capricious nor even self-serving.

2. Zola’s recent biographers do not make a connection between his molestation and Truth. Brown sees the event as the origin of Zola’s later puritanical moralism and a possible source for Thérèse Raquin (a very plausible suggestion) (24), while Mitterand denies categorically that he “retained the slightest trauma from it,” except that it may have favored his later transgression of prudish taboos (Olympia 93).
3. Zola is echoing here the party line of *L'Aurore* in response to the amnesty. In the number of October 2, 1899, Clemenceau had denounced the amnesty as a betrayal (*trahison*) of the Republic, because it delivered the republican government over “to the barracks and the sacristy” (Cassaing 301). 

4. Earlier in the novel, while mulling over the causes of the Church’s newfound power and arrogance, Marc had already expressed his views on the role of the bourgeoisie:

The bourgeoisie, which used to be liberal, non-believing and rebellious, now has been reconquered by its retrograde spirit, out of the terror of being dispossessed, of ceding its place to the rising tide of the people. (190).

In 89, victorious over the dying nobility, the bourgeoisie had replaced it; and for a century it had kept its booty, refusing its just share to the people. Now its role was finished, it confessed it itself by going over to reaction, hysterical at the idea of giving back, terrified by the rise of democracy that was going to sweep it away. (172; 192)

5. It was all the easier for Zola to identify with the Jewish captain, since not only was he vilified as a Jew lover during the Affair, but many years before, Octave Mirbeau, in his early anti-Semitic days, had assimilated naturalism to Judaism, because both “lacked metaphysics and mystery,” were materialistic and “pornographic,” and, in Zola’s case, involved the large-scale commercialization and industrialization anti-Semites associated with Jewish capitalism (“Le théâtre juif,” in the short-lived anti-Semitic journal, *Les grimaces* [November 3, 1883]; cited in Wilson, *Bernard Lazare* 71–72). (But note that Mirbeau later changed sides completely and became a friend of Bernard-Lazare and an ardent Dreyfusard.)

6. Cosset makes a similar point, but in a more nuanced way. She evaluates this episode as just one example of Zola’s artful representation of the relation between reality and utopia, present and future, in the novel as a whole: “The constant criss-crossing between a discourse about a ‘pre-utopian’ past and a discourse about the utopian present constitutes a form of argumentation that undermines myth and aims toward making utopia plausible” (141).

7. It is true that both Thérèse and Marc then attempt to justify the necessity of suffering with various standard theological and scientific arguments, but even the characters themselves seem unconvinced by these half-hearted rationalizations. The inevitability of physical and mental suffering was, in fact, one of the tenets of turn-of-the-century socialism, as we have seen in France’s *Contemporary History.*

8. Zola, and Gaillard, are of course simply echoing a view at least as old as Plato’s *Republic.* The main force of *L’Assommoir* stems not from the stereotyped idea, but from the detailed picture Zola paints of the ways the working people of Paris go about finding their enjoyment.

9. “If you can enlighten mankind,” Becker and Lavielle explain, “the ‘human beast’ (*la bête humaine*) remains, despite everything, crouching in the shadows, ready to drive people to crime, to rape, to uncontrollable passions” (“Préface” 28). Indeed, Mitterand contends that *Truth* is a rewriting of the novel titled *La bête humaine* (*L’honneur* 738–39).

10. See Jean-Louis Bory’s introduction to *Vérité* 999, and Laville 131, both of whom emphasize the first words of that preface, “Je veux expliquer.”

11. “I’ve often said that we don’t have to draw conclusions from our works, which means that our works carry their conclusions in themselves. An experimenter does not have to conclude, precisely because the experiment concludes for him. . . . It’s always up
to society to produce or not to produce the phenomenon, if its result is useful or dangerous” (*Roman expérimental* 79).

**Conclusion**

1. I should point out that the education novels of the period written about, and especially by women, show different concerns: attaining autonomy, developing their intellectual and artistic potential, and achieving professional success, while maintaining their desire for sexual, emotional, and maternal fulfillment. No longer do they want to be identified only as saints, wives, and mothers, forced to choose between sexual and professional gratification. For the women, the question of identity is a matter of their relation not to a transcendent Other, but to the immanent Other of social definitions and restrictions.


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