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Gustav III of Sweden and the Enlightenment

H. ARNOLD BARTON

"YOU MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT you were looking at a minuet," wrote Paul Hazard. "The Princes bow to the Philosophers, the Philosophers return the bow."[1] The relationship is nonetheless a complex and ambiguous one, as a consideration of Gustav III of Sweden (1771–1792), traditionally included among eighteenth-century enlightened despots, will show.

Gustav was born in 1746, when the monarch in Sweden was a crowned figurehead under the constitution of 1720 and the all-powerful Estates were bedeviled by the rivalry of Hats and Caps. His father, King Adolf Fredrik, was a man of modest pretensions. His mother, the intelligent and ambitious Lovisa Ulrika, sister of Frederick the Great of Prussia, was keenly interested in the scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic trends of the day and was in particular an admirer of Voltaire, whom she had known in Potsdam.[2]

In his fourth year, Gustav had appointed to him as governor Count Carl Gustav Tessin, who employed an informal, relaxed pedagogy, deriving largely from Locke. The queen, much concerned with the education of her first-born, wrote her mother in Berlin in 1752 that he was making great progress through instruction that stressed "reasoning" rather than "mechanical" memorization. Tessin had been at the Versailles of Louis XIV and had later served as ambassador to Paris. He imbued his pupil with the classical ideals of seventeenth-century France and the precepts of Fénelon's *Télémaque*.[3] Gustav's inspiring tutor in history was meanwhile Olof von Dalin, known somewhat extravagantly at the time as the "Voltaire

[1] Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1963), p. 328.

[2] On Lovisa Ulrika, see esp. Olof Jägerskiöld, *Lovisa Ulrika* (Stockholm, 1945); cf. Auguste Geffroy, *Gustave III et la cour de France,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1867), I, 60–61.

[3] Beth Hennings, *Gustav III som kronprins* (Stockholm, 1935), pp. 20–49; Beth Hennings, ed., *Ögonvittnen om Gustav III* (Stockholm, 1960) pp. 16–17 (hereafter cited as *Ögonvittnen*). Cf. Tessin's published letters to G., *En gammal mans bref till en ung prins,* 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1756), which was widely translated into other languages, and G.'s published replies in *En ung herres svar på en gammal mans bref år 1753* (Stockholm, 1753). Geffroy, I, 76–94, gives excerpts from Tessin's letters.

of the North," a skeptical *esprit-fort* who subtly undermined much of the effect of Tessin's conventional piety.[4]

In 1756, the Estates, suspecting Tessin's and Dalin's political principles, replaced them. The prince's new governor was Count Carl Fredrik Scheffer, likewise a former envoy to Paris, where he was well known in philosophic circles. His instruction drew extensively upon contemporary political theory and stressed the works of Locke, Wolff, and Burlamaqui.[5] In 1762, the prince's education was declared completed. It had been prevailingly French in tone; French was Gustav's only foreign language, but he mastered it well and continued to use it by preference.[6] He retained a strong interest in history, literature, and the theater, regarding them all, in the fashion of the time, as effective vehicles for the conveying of ethical and civic ideals.[7] He was meanwhile observed to incline toward grandiose ideas, theatricality, at times a certain indolence, while the difficult political circumstances of his childhood, reflected in the arbitrary change of his tutors, had produced in him tendencies toward secretiveness and dissimulation, which caution the historian against always taking him too literally at his own word.[8]

In 1766, Gustav married the Danish princess, Sophia Magdalena,

[4] On Dalin, see Alrik Gustafson, *A History of Swedish Literature* (Minneapolis, 1961), pp. 113–17. On his skepticism, see Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* pp. 30, 35, 47, 61, 88; Bernhard von Schinkel and C. W. Bergman, *Minnen ur Sveriges nyare historia,* 12 vols. (Stockholm, 1852–93), I, 244–45.

[5] Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* pp. 71–98; [C.F. Scheffer], *Pièces concernant l'éducation du Prince Royal à présent Roi de Suède* (Stockholm, 1773); [C.F. Scheffer], *Commerce épistolaire entre un jeune prince et son gouverneur* (Stockholm, 1771); Geffroy, I, 94–97. Geffroy is unjustifiably critical of Tessin and Scheffer (cf. ibid., pp. 99–100).

[6] See Gunnar von Proschwitz, *Gustave III de Suède et la langue française* (Göteborg, 1962).

[7] Henrik Schück, ed., *Gustaf III:s och Lovisa Ulrikas Brevväxling,* 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1919), I, 1–2 (hereafter, Schück); Scheffer, *Commerce,* p. 288; *Ögonvittnen,* pp. 20–24, 35, 375; Beth Hennings, *Gustav III,* 2d ed. (Stockholm, 1967), pp. 35–36; Sven Delblanc, *Ära och minne. Studier kring ett motivkomplex i 1700-talets litteratur* (Stockholm, 1965), esp. pp. 136–43; Georg Landberg, *Gustav III i eftervärldens dom,* 2d ed. (Stockholm, 1968), pp. 122–24.

[8] *Ögonvittnen,* pp. 24–25; C. C. Bonde and C. af Klercker, ed., *Hedvig Elisabeth Charlottas dagbok,* 9 vols. (Stockholm, 1902–42), I, 167–69. Cf. Landberg, p. 108. Cf. G.'s own justification of dissimulation, under certain circumstances, to Scheffer in 1759, in J.-B. Dechaux, ed., *Collection des écrits politiques, littéraires et dramatiques de Gustave III, roi de Suède, suivie de sa correspondance,* 5 vols. (Stockholm, 1803–5), IV, 3, (hereafter, *Ecrits*).

established his own court, and began to play a role in politics. That system, he had written Scheffer in 1760, "which says the behavior of men depends upon the good or bad examples they receive from their sovereigns appears to me the best of those doctrines you have reported to me." A rough constitutional draft he prepared in 1766 shows a good knowledge of Sweden's existing constitution, together with a clear preference for strong kingship.[9] This is hardly surprising considering the humiliating limitations on royal power at the time. Lovisa Ulrika despised the existing regime, envying her brother Frederick's Prussian autocracy, while Tessin and especially Dalin had idealized the model of the heroic and magnanimous prince.[10] A powerful influence in this direction was meanwhile Count Scheffer, who had become progressively disillusioned with things as they were, and through him the French Physiocrats. In 1767, Scheffer introduced Gustav to P.F.J.H. Le Mercier de la Rivière's *L'Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques,* published that year, which deeply impressed him. This, he wrote his mother, contained new ideas which should cause a "revolution in thinking," and could save Sweden from her "present ruin"; for days he could think of nothing but the "principles essential to the social order." The following year, thus inspired, he applied himself for a time to the uncongenial study of financial and economic matters.[11]

As Le Mercier de la Rivière has since been so largely forgotten it is worth recalling that the onetime governor of Martinique caused a sensation with his *L'Ordre naturel,* the fullest summary of physiocratic doctrine, at the time largely overshadowed both Montesquieu and Rousseau, and aroused the lively interest of such monarchs as Catherine II, Leopold of Tuscany and Charles Frederick of Baden. He was hailed as a veritable Newton of the social order, which he held to be based upon "physical necessity" rather

[9] Scheffer, *Commerce,* pp. 282, 284; Beth Hennings, "Gustav III och författningen," in her *Fyra gustavianska studier* (Stockholm, 1967), pp. 10–11.

[10] Schück, I, 1–3, 6, 16–17, 114; II, 38; Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* pp. 35, 41, 43–44, 54.

[11] Schück, I, 111, 116–17. G.'s letters do not speak of this work by name; it is identified by B. Hennings in *G. som kronprins,* pp. 299–300. On G.'s economic studies, see Schück, I, 141, 145–46, 149, 152–53. For discussion of physiocratic influences on G. and Scheffer, see Eli F. Heckscher, "Fysiokratismens ekonomiska inflytande i Sverige," *Lychnos* (1943), 1–18; Oswald Sirén, "Kina och den kinesiska tanken i Sverige på 1700-talet," *Lychnos* (1948), 1–82; P. Nyström, "Thorhilds lära om harmonien och dess idéhistoriska bakgrund. En linje i den gustavianska tidens politiska ideologibildningar," *Scandia,* 12 (1939), 1–31; Folke Almén, *Gustav III och hans rådgivare 1772–89* (Uppsala, 1940), pp. 8–10, 42–43.

than voluntary social contract, hence upon "simple, evident, immutable," natural laws. Property, the basis of self-preservation, was the precondition from which all other "natural and essential principles" of society derived, though it was necessarily distributed unequally due to men's differing capabilities, thereby creating social classes. While all stood to gain from increasing national prosperity, competing particular interests prevented just and efficient government by *"la nation en corps."* Only a hereditary sovereign with unlimited, combined "tutelary" and executive power could uphold the common good while protecting and balancing the legitimate rights of each class for the "reciprocal utility" of all. As "co-proprietor," his own interests would be inseparable from those of the nation. It was the task of this "Legislator," surrounded by a "concourse of *lumières,*" to discover and apply the "evident" underlying principles of society, and through public education, freedom of expression (*"liberté d'examen et de contradiction"*), and an independent judiciary, to demonstrate to his subjects that herein lay their true felicity. Thus basing his regime upon the willing assent of his subjects rather than upon force, and maintaining "liberty, property, security," he would exercise a "true" or "legal" despotism, like that "veritable despot," Euclid, who revealed the natural laws of geometry, and in contrast to the "arbitrary" despotisms of the past or those necessarily resulting from "aristocratic" or "democratic" rule. The latter half of Le Mercier's work consists of a detailed exposition of physiocratic political economy.[12]

In March 1768, encouraged by the duc de Choiseul to hope for French aid in forcing a change of regime, Gustav drafted a second constitutional project. Its stated detestation of autocracy must be considered a political strategem, for its details nonetheless provide for an effective royal absolutism.[13] A coup at this stage, however, required the cooperation of the Hats—then out of office and lusting for revenge against the Caps—and to win them required further concessions. By the end of 1768, Gustav therefore speculated over a constitution now ostensibly based more upon Montesquieu's separation of powers than upon the physiocratic ideal of "legal despo-

[12] P.F.J.H. Le Mercier de la Rivière, *L'Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques* (London, 1767), passim. Cf. Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* p. 302; Nyström, pp. 8–12; Henry Higgs, *The Physiocrats* (London, 1896), pp. 68–74, 88–89.

[13] Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 13–15.

tism," but which still provided for a greatly strengthened monarchy.[14] These projects for a change of constitution continued into 1769, when they collapsed at the Riksdag of that year.

The court of the crown prince became a center for the cultivation of literary and philosophical interests, drawing to it that kind of select circle of cultivated minds to which it would always remain Gustav's habit to escape from the cares of office. Contemporaries speak of the long reading sessions in the evenings from the latest French works. We thus see Gustav and his friends in 1762, discussing Helvétius' *De l'esprit,* or, twenty years later, Rousseau's *Confessions.* "The prince has read an incredible amount," exclaimed the historian, Anders Schönberg, in 1768. Catalogs in the Royal Library in Stockholm show how voluminous was his personal library and how quickly he acquired the latest works of the Enlightenment.[15]

Gustav's preserved correspondence contains few letters to or from the *philosophes,* and most of these contain little more than polite compliments. This is misleading, for he could and did maintain contacts with them through others. The dowager queen's influential lector, the Swiss, Jean–François Beylon, apparently played such a role and Scheffer corresponded diligently with his Parisian friends, especially among the Physiocrats.[16] The Swedish ambassador to Paris after 1766, Count Gustaf Filip Creutz, was well received in philosophic circles and on excellent terms with Voltaire in Ferney. He kept Gustav informed and sent him new books, including the successive volumes of the *Encyclopédie.*[17] It was Creutz who already

[14] Ibid., pp. 16–17; Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* pp. 338–40; Almén, pp. 12–22; E. G. Geijer, ed., *Konung Gustaf III:s efterlemnade och femtio år efter hans död öppnade papper,* 2d ed. (Stockholm, 1876), pp. 58, 60–61, (hereafter Geijer).

[15] G. J. Ehrensvärd, *Dagboksanteckningar förda vid Gustaf III:s hof,* ed. E. V. Montan, 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1877–78), I, 17; *Ögonvittnen,* pp. 33–35, 44–46, 85, 112, 171; Sven Delblanc, "Le manuscrit suédois de la Correspondance Littéraire de Grimm. Une découverte complémentaire," *Samlaren* (1957), 77–79; Handskriftssamlingen U.210–214, Kungliga biblioteket, Stockholm.

[16] Gustavianska samlingen, Uppsala universitetsbibliotek, catalog; W. Swahn, *Beylon, Sveriges store okände* (Stockholm, 1925); Hyppolite Buffenoir, "Lettres inédites du XVIIIe siècle. Le comte suédois Charles–Frédéric Scheffer et ses amis de France," *Feuilles d'Histoire du XVIIe au XXe siècle,* II (1909), 485–514. Cf. Gunnar von Proschwitz, ed., "Lettres inédites de Madame Du Deffand, du président Hénault et du comte de Bulkeley au baron Carl Fredrik Scheffer, 1751–1756," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century,* 10 (1959), 267–412.

[17] Geijer, pp. 77–79; cf. Geffroy, I, 101–6; A. J. O. Beuchot, ed., *Œuvres de Voltaire,* 72 vols. (Paris, 1829–40), LXI, 438–39.

in 1763, having visited Ferney, wrote that the patriarch had wept tears of joy on hearing Gustav had learned his *Henriade* by heart, moving him to prophesy that in fifty years "prejudice" would have disappeared in Europe. Voltaire continued to follow the prince's career with interest.[18] For Marmontel, Gustav felt a particular sympathy; when his *Bélisaire* was banned by the Sorbonne in 1767, Gustav wrote him of his admiration for "the great lessons you give to kings" while condemning clerical obscurantism in terms that caused him some embarrassment with the French government when his letter promptly appeared in print in Paris.[19]

Gustav's correspondence with his mother is filled with literary and philosophical commentary, often showing keen critical insight. She invites him in 1768, for instance, to spend an evening sharing a fresh stock of "bonbons" from the "factory at Ferney." Voltaire is clearly their favorite. Not that Gustav was an uncritical admirer. To Scheffer he criticized him in 1767 for confusing religious fanaticism with true piety and even admitted that Voltaire sometimes "scandalized," while delighting him. Nor could he welcome the philosopher's fulsome praise for Catherine II's intervention in Poland, where the situation perilously resembled Sweden's, nor his *L'Homme aux quarante écus* (1768), which ridiculed Le Mercier de la Rivière's "natural order." Yet he found Voltaire's style irresistible and warmly admired his struggle for reason and justice. "It is Voltaire," he wrote in 1770, "who first had the courage to rise up against fanaticism. He has thereby perhaps done more good in a few years than sovereigns in the course of the longest reigns." Later that year he contributed to the fund for Pigalle's statue of Voltaire, to honor, in his words, "the defender of Calas, the protector of the unhappy Sirven family, the opponent of fanaticism and superstition, the defender of humanity."[20]

At last, in the winter of 1771, Gustav himself visited Paris. He was much impressed by Versailles but preferred to stay in the city,

[18] Geijer, p. 78; *Œuvres de Voltaire,* LXVII, 91, 282; LXVIII, 156. The standard work on Creutz is Gunnar Castrén, *Gustav Philip Creutz* (Stockholm, 1917). Cf. G.'s comments to Scheffer in 1760 on the *Henriade* (Scheffer, *Commerce,* pp. 352–60).

[19] Sven Ulrik Palme, "Gustav III och Marmontel," *Personhistorisk tidskrift,* 53 (1955), esp. 15–19. Cf. Geffroy, I, 103–4; Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* p. 172.

[20] Schück, I and II, passim., (quotation from ibid., I, 129). Cf. ibid., p. 124; Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* pp. 170–72; Pierre de Luz, *Gustav III. Ett porträtt* (Stockholm, 1949), pp. 52–54, 107–8; Higgs, pp. 112–16.

where he consorted with the elite of birth and talent. Scheffer, Creutz, and the *homme de lettres,* Claude Carloman de Rulhière, were his cicerones in the literary world. Within a few days he could write his mother than he had met "almost all the philosophers": these included Helvétius, Marmontel, Grimm, Morellet, Quesnay, Chastellux, d'Alembert, the elder Mirabeau, even the misanthropic Rousseau. "Never has a prince received a finer education and better profited from it," observed Bachaumont's *Mémoires secrètes,* adding that Gustav was constantly surrounded by the "philosopher-encyclopedists," who saw in him their "protector," the "zealous sectary of their doctrines," and that he showed particular favor to d'Alembert. Marmontel dedicated his *Les Incas* to him and d'Alembert delivered flattering orations at the French Academy and the Royal Academy of Sciences, speaking on the latter occasion of the triumphant advance of philosophy in the face of persecution and praising those monarchs who gave it their protection. Diderot, however, seems to have been relieved to escape the princely visitor, perhaps with a thought to the reaction of his patroness, Catherine II. Gustav meanwhile reveled in the conversation of the great salons. In the midst of this whirl he learned of his father's death. To Marmontel, he confided his grief at being called to the throne so soon, leaving Paris before learning all he had come to learn, and the fear that he must now bid farewell forever to "friendship and truth." "Truth flees only those kings who reject it," replied the philosopher. Regretfully too, Gustav now had to forego his pilgrimage to Ferney.[21]

Gustav's visits with Rousseau, arranged by Rulhière, unfortunately remain rather a mystery. Rousseau owned himself well impressed but evidently declined a flattering offer, probably asylum under royal protection in Sweden. Already in 1760, Gustav had

[21] *Ögonvittnen,* pp. 52–59; Maurice Tourneux, ed., *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot . . . etc.,* 16 vols. (Paris, 1877–82), IX, 275–77, 279–80; X, 21–22; Louis Petit de Bachaumont, ed., *Mémoires secrètes pour servir à l'histoire de la République des lettres en France,* 36 vols. (London, 1784–89), V, 262–63; Denis Diderot, *Correspondance,* ed. Georges Roth and Jean Varloot, 16 vols. to date (Paris, 1955–), XIV, 226; Maurice Tourneux, ed., *Mémoires de Marmontel,* 3 vols. (Paris, 1891), II, 339–40; *Correspondance inédite de Mme du Deffand,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1859), I, 264, 279–80; Schück, I, 262; II, 341; Geffroy, I, 107–19; Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 49–50; de Luz, pp. 49, 55; Sirén, p. 45. The *Œuvres complètes de d'Alembert,* 5 vols. (Paris, 1821–22) contains his address at the French Academy of 6 March 1771 (IV, 468–75), but not his address to the Academy of Sciences, which is, however, summarized in a letter of 10 March 1771 from Mme du Deffand to Horace Walpole, given in *Ögonvittnen,* p. 58.

strongly reacted against Rousseau's critique of "letters and sciences," which would "plunge us . . . back into our original barbarism," and he can have felt scant sympathy for the ideals of the *Contrat social.* Moreover, too close an association with Rousseau could cause unwelcome complications with Voltaire. Most likely, Gustav expected and hoped Rousseau would decline, after he had won the philosopher's influential goodwill through a magnanimous gesture.[22]

The interest and enthusiasm with which Gustav was received in Paris reflected a long-standing interest in Sweden, dating at least from the Thirty Years' War. This had been stimulated by the exploits of Charles XII and especially Voltaire's account of them. Preromantic sensibilities were attracted to ancient Scandinavia through the writings of Paul Henri Mallet. Linnaeus and Swedenborg were internationally renowned figures. Conflicts between the crown and the *parlements* meanwhile encouraged interest not only in the English but in the Swedish constitution of 1720, which was widely admired among the philosophic party. Montesquieu, invoking Jordanes and Olof Rudbeck, praised Scandinavia in *L'Esprit des lois* (1748) as the home of European liberties, the "factory of those instruments which break the shackles forged in the South," while Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756) called Sweden "the freest kingdom on earth." The chevalier de Jaucourt paid tribute to her *"belle constitution"* in the *Encyclopédie,* noting particularly the political representation of the Peasant Estate, while Rousseau was reputed to have refused to show his model constitution for Poland to a Swede, claiming he had nothing to learn from it. Most enthusiastic of all was the abbé de Mably, whose works often discuss Sweden. Though he profoundly misunderstood Swedish history and conditions, he considered the Swedish constitution of 1720 "the masterpiece of modern legislation" in its provisions for "the rights of humanity and equality." His *De la législation* is a book-length debate between a Swede and an Englishman, in which the former proves the superiority of his constitution.[23] To the *philosophes,* disillusioned with the France

[22] Scheffer, *Commerce,* pp. 282, 286, 288, 300, 302; de Luz, pp. 262–65; Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* pp. 171, 173, 388; Michel Launay, "J.-J. Rousseau et Gustave III de Suède," *Revue de littérature comparée,* 32 (1958), 496–509.

[23] Voltaire, *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731); *Essai sur les mœurs, Œuvres de Voltaire,* XVIII, 397; Montesquieu, *L'Esprit des lois* (1748), Bk. XVII, Ch. ii; Bk. XVII, Ch. v; Paul Henri Mallet, *Monuments de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves* (1756); Abbé de Mably, *Le droit public de l'Europe,* in *Œuvres complètes de l'abbé de Mably,* 12 vols. (Lon-

of Louis XV, Gustav III held out the prospect of a philosophic prince ruling over an enlightened people.

Those with whom Gustav formed the closest bonds in Paris were meanwhile the *grandes dames* at whose salons the philosophic world foregathered. This was largely for political reasons, for the dismissal of Choiseul and the suppression of the *parlements* by Chancellor Maupeou at the turn of the year had created a highly fluid situation and Gustav, heavily dependent upon French good will, was anxious to have sources of information and influence in each faction. His closest Paris friends—the Countesses de La Marck, d'Egmont and de Boufflers—were nonetheless avid supporters of the *parlements* and admirers of British institutions.[24] During his stay in Paris and by correspondence afterwards they urged upon him, in Mme d'Egmont's words, a "monarchy limited by laws."[25]

How did Gustav react to his direct encounter with the *philosophes*? Not altogether favorably. "They are more amiable to read than to see," he wrote his mother, adding that she was the only person to whom he dared say such a "frightful blasphemy." He was taken aback by their immodest pretensions. His reaction to the advice of his lady admirers in Paris shows him less sanguine than they regarding the blessings of constitutional liberty. The Swedish Diet, he wrote Mme de Boufflers in the fall of 1771, was "no pleasant spectacle for any but cosmopolitan philosophers."[26]

Yet it would appear that Gustav returned from Paris not unaffected by libertarian and anglophile influences. He was, to be sure,

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don, 1789), VI, 164, 169–70, 180, 188–89, 192–94; VII, 41–42, 48–49, 203–4, 234–35; Mably, *De la législation ou principes des loix,* in *Œuvres complètes,* IX, passim; Harald Elovson, "Raynal och Sverige," *Samlaren,* ny följd, årgång 9 (1928), 23–25; Stig Boberg, *Gustav III och tryckfriheten 1774–1787* (Stockholm, 1951), p. 39. On Mably, see also Kingsley Martin, *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century,* rev. ed. (New York, 1963), esp. pp. 247–49.

[24] Geffroy, I, 110–12, 115–16, 204–16, 223–74; du Deffand, I, 260, 262–64, 273, 279–80, 284, 294, 298; Beth Hennings, ed., *Gustav III och grevinnan de Boufflers* (Stockholm. 1928), pp. 7–32; Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 18–20. Cf. Comtesse Marie d'Armaillé, *La comtesse d'Egmont, fille du maréchal de Richelieu, 1740–1775, d'après ses lettres inédites à Gustave III* (Paris, 1890); Beth Hennings, *Grevinnan d'Egmont och Gustav III* (Stockholm, 1920).

[25] Geffroy, I, 232–36, 239–42; Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 20–21.

[26] Schück, I, 264; Aurélien Vivie, ed., *Lettres de Gustave III à la comtesse de Boufflers et de la comtesse au roi,* Actes de l'Académie nationale des sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Bordeaux, 1898 (Paris, 1898), p. 39 (henceforward Vivie). Hennings, *Gustav III och grevinnan de Boufflers* contains all G.'s letters to Mme de Boufflers and excerpts from hers to him, in Swedish translation.

warned against any violent attempt to change Sweden's constitution by both the French foreign minister and by his uncle, Frederick II, whom he visited in Berlin on the way home. There nonetheless seems to be more than mere propaganda in the assurance he wrote Mme de La Marck while crossing the Baltic: that he considered "despotism" as harmful for the master as for his subjects and that he would in time prove that he respected "liberty, properly understood, founded on reason and humanity" as much as he despised "anarchy and dissolution." Still more noteworthy seems his condemnation, in a letter to his mother, of Charles XI, the founder of royal absolutism in Sweden in 1680, who, Gustav claimed, "rent the veil that separates the rights of the people from those of the king," thereby inspiring the nation with fear and suspicion toward the monarch.[27]

Gustav appears impressed at this point with the importance of the willing obedience of subjects and of Montesquieu's axiom that a true monarchy must rest upon a social hierarchy headed by a healthy aristocracy. George III in Great Britain seemed to exemplify the ideal of the "patriot king," who held the balance between the various interest groups within Parliament. It was this which Gustav at first tried to realize through his policy of "composition" between the feuding Hats and Caps at the Riksdag of 1771–72. The works of Bolingbroke and his followers were well known in Sweden; Count Tessin had in particular been a strong advocate of their views, which again came to the fore in political discussion at the time of Gustav's accession. Already in July 1771, he was hailed by a pamphleteer as a "patriot king" and Gustav, in opening the Riksdag, claimed it his "greatest glory" to be "the first citizen of a free people."[28]

The experiment in mediation soon broke down as social conflict

[27] Geffroy, I, 252–53; Schück, II, 117. Lovisa Ulrika replied with a spirited defense of Charles XI (Schück, II, 153). Cf. Geijer, pp. 77, 250; Almén, pp. 45–46.

[28] Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 20–23; Gunnar Kjellin, "Gustaf III, den patriotiske konungen," *Gottfrid Carlsson 18.12.1952* (Lund, 1952), 323–38; Birger Sallnäs, "England i den svenska författningsdiskussionen 1771–72," *Vetenskapssocieteten i Lunds årsbok 1958–59* (Lund, 1959), 19–31; *Ecrits*, I, 87. On the prevalence of belief in the essential role of the aristocracy as the foundation of monarchical government in the eighteenth century, see R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1959–64), I, 55–67.

began to overshadow the political struggle. The three lower estates attacked noble privileges, both in the Riksdag and through a rash of pamphleteering. To Gustav, the situation was alarming, yet offered new opportunities. He wrote Mme de Boufflers in June 1772 of the "onslaught of Democracy against the expiring Aristocracy, the latter preferring to submit to Democracy rather than be protected by the Monarchy, which opens its arms to it." Sweden was rapidly approaching "anarchy, . . . the spectacle Poland affords"; to avoid this "anything" was "permissible." "They did not want a well-regulated liberty in 1769; they shall have it in 1772," he wrote his mother.[29]

On 19 August 1772, Gustav carried off an audacious yet bloodless coup d'état and two days later gained consent from the assembled Estates for a new constitution. This greatly strengthened royal power, though it did not establish royal autocracy, and the king in its preamble expressly proclaimed "abhorrence" for "despotic power." The document is nonetheless ambiguous on important points, which cannot have been due to oversight; while it could in time allow the development of a truly constitutional regime, it left ample scope for an ambitious monarch further to extend his authority.[30] Why did Gustav not establish a complete autocracy? If this was his desire, he still needed the support of powerful elements which would not accept an absolute monarch, while to go that far would invite foreign, especially Russian intervention.[31] Yet it is not altogether clear that an autocracy was what Gustav wanted. Scheffer and others evidently urged him to utilize the social conflict by backing the commoners against the nobility; he might thus have won far more absolute powers, as indeed he later did by this very means in

[29] Vivie, pp. 51–52; Schück, II, 135. For G.'s preoccupation over the fate of Poland, cf. Geijer, pp. 41–43.

[30] On the provisions of the constitution, see esp. Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 25–27. The constitution is given in full, in English, in William Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark,* 5 vols. (Dublin, 1802), IV, 327–50. Cf. *Ecrits,* I, 101–9.

[31] G.'s actual intentions in 1772 have been much debated. See, for instance, C. T. Odhner, *Sveriges politiska historia under konung Gustaf III:s regering,* 3 vols. (Stockholm, 1885–1905), I, 112–13, 240–41; Ludvig Stavenow, *Den gustavianska tiden 1772–1809* (Stockholm, 1925), pp. 11–13; Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 7–8, 24–30. See also my "Russia and the Problem of Sweden-Finland, 1721–1809," *East European Quarterly,* 5 (January 1972), 431–55.

1789.[32] This, however, implied following the path of Charles XI. He wrote his mother on 22 August:

> I had absolute power in my hands through the voluntary submission, separately, of each of the Estates, but I considered it nobler, grander, more conformable to all I had said previously, and certainly surer for my future government, myself to limit the royal authority, leaving to the nation the essential rights of liberty and keeping for myself only what is necessary to prevent licence.

His own intention, he repeatedly claimed, was to reestablish the constitution of Gustav II Adolf, which provided in his view for the rallying of all the Estates, headed by the nobility, around the throne. While he inveighed against a licentious and corrupt "aristocracy" which had threatened the nation with ruin under the former regime, the actual social significance of Gustav's revolution was that it rescued the nobility from the attack of the other orders, thereby gaining, initially at least, their enthusiastic support.[33] Clearly, however, he intended for the crown to play the leading role.

These ideas accorded well with certain Swedish traditions, with the emphasis of Le Mercier de la Rivière and the Physiocrats on the natural existence of social classes based on property, with Bolingbroke's ideal of the "patriot king," with Gustav's exalted conceptions of Henry IV and Louis XIV, all of which has been duly noted by Swedish historians. It would seem however that Montesquieu's influence has not been given sufficient stress. To be sure, Gustav's discovery of his ideas was not sudden or dramatic, as with Le Mercier. Yet one of his earliest childhood essays is his unfinished "Réflexions sur l'Esprit des lois de Montesquieu." He criticized Montesquieu's climatic theory to Scheffer in 1760, arguing instead that "example and education" were decisive to the behavior of nations. Yet Montesquieu's influence upon his constitutional speculations in late 1768 has already been seen. In 1770, Gustav noted, "I have nourished myself on David Hume's, Cardinal de Retz' and Montesquieu's writ-

[32] Hennings, "G. och författn.," p. 23.

[33] Schück, II, 255; Sten Carlsson, *Svensk historia,* II (Stockholm, 1961), 251; Odhner, I, 113, 241; Landberg, pp. 94–95; Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* pp. 302–3; Geijer, pp. 58–59; *Ecrits,* I, 101–9. Cf. S. Boberg's discussion of G.'s royalist propaganda using the Gustav Adolf theme, in *Gustav III och tryckfriheten,* pp. 138–58; also R. M. Klinckowström, ed., *Fredrik Axel von Fersens historiska skrifter,* 8 vols. in 5 (Stockholm, 1867–72), III, 115 (henceforward Fersen), on G.'s manipulation of the term "aristocracy."

ings."[34] Neither political circumstances nor the young king's ambition were altogether conducive to Montesquieu's theoretical, clear-cut division and equal balance of powers, yet Gustav's constitution of 1772 came closer in both respects to Montesquieu's ideal monarchy than the preceding regime. More influential still, however, were Montesquieu's ideas concerning the social bases of the state, which remained fundamental to Gustav's thinking, as shown, for instance, by a letter to Mme de Boufflers some years later, at the time of the 1778 Riksdag:

> . . . not knowing your customs, your principles, it is so difficult to judge properly each country's internal arrangements: climate, fundamental principles differ so greatly from one nation to the next that what suits the one is harmful to the other. There are certain parties which seek to gain too great an ascendancy over the others and which must be repressed; it is the true science of sovereigns to balance them, and to hold this balance in just equilibrium. If this equilibrium is ever lost, harmful consequences follow: with us it is democracy which seeks to gain the upper hand and all my efforts are aimed at reestablishing the old high nobility. With you, perhaps the people are too oppressed and count for too little, the nobility too favored.

Privately, he noted to himself at the same time:

> Indifference toward birth or those distinctions our forefathers established to separate the most distinguished from the people is attractive only as speculation, in practice almost always impossible. This equality can only exist in a democracy or under a despotism, where there is only one master and slaves.[35]

Among Gustav's most immediate concerns in 1772 was obtaining the favor of enlightened opinion in Europe for his change of regime. He wrote without delay to his ladies in Paris, claiming that he had saved the state from immanent collapse but that far from seeking absolute power, he had retained only enough to "do good and prevent licence." His new constitution, he claimed to Mme de Boufflers, was

[34] Gustavianska samlingen, Vol. I (Folio), No. 9, Uppsala universetetsbibliotek; Scheffer, *Commerce,* pp. 282, 290; Geijer, p. 77; Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* pp. 338–40.

[35] Vivie, pp. 115–16; Geijer, pp. 60, 250. Cf. Nyström's emphasis (pp. 13–14) on the physiocratic features of the new constitution. Almén, pp. 19–22, 27–33, 37–45, 51–53, argues the limitations of the influence of Montesquieu and the Physiocrats as applied to the constitution.

based on the true principles of liberty and distinguished between the rights of the king and of his subjects "with the equity necessary for the common good."[36] He immediately sent an account of his revolution to Voltaire, who returned enthusiastic congratulations and a poem hailing the "Young and worthy heir to the name of Gustav." The event came at a fortunate moment for Voltaire. In his play, *Les lois de Minos,* which had just come out, a mythical king of Crete, who had travelled to the "Land of the Velches" and there become enlightened, returned to his kingdom to overthrow a corrupt aristocratic regime. Voltaire first claimed to have in mind King Stanislaus Poniatowski of Poland, but Paris detected allusions to the struggle between Maupeou and the *parlements,* causing delays in the play's production. Voltaire now opportunistically added the explanation that it referred to Gustav III and the "just and moderate authority" he had reestablished in Sweden.[37] D'Alembert and Marmontel were likewise much impressed, as was the elder Mirabeau who praised the "first revolution that belonged to reason."[38]

Others were, however, more reserved. Mme d'Egmont congratulated the "hero" of her heart, adding pointedly that he surely would not abuse "this power which an elated people has confided to you without limits." Mme de Boufflers was more direct. Having studied the new constitution, she wrote Gustav that she could not at present regard him as other than an "absolute king," warning that autocracy was "incontestably" a "mortal malady . . . which ends by destroying states" and urging that he further limit, when possible, a power others might abuse. An analysis she made at about the same time of the constitution's first sixteen articles, which she only showed Gustav in 1780, proves how well she comprehended both its stipulations and its omissions.[39]

There were meanwhile those who reacted strongly against Gustav's actions. Catherine II's feelings may well be imagined; to Voltaire she predicted a regime "as despotic as France's." When Mme du Deffand praised Gustav's revolution to the duchesse de Choiseul, the latter responded contemptuously that she could not understand "this liberty which the king of Sweden has given his nation, in re-

[36] Geffroy, I, 204–7, 217, 243–44; Vivie, p. 58.
[37] Geffroy, I, 217–21; *Œuvres de Voltaire,* IX, 360 and note.
[38] Geffroy, I, 222; Heckscher, p. 10.
[39] Vivie, pp. 61–62, 65–67, 69–74, 160–61.

serving for himself the right to propose anything, to do anything, to prevent anything!" The abbé Raynal, who unlike many of the *philosophes* had criticized the former regime in Sweden for its corruption in the first edition (1770) of his *Histoire des deux Indes,* urging the nation itself to restore sufficient powers to its "phantom king," was nonetheless strongly critical of Gustav's revolution in the second edition of this work in 1774. He condemned the Swedes for throwing themselves abjectly at their monarch's feet and accepting from him, rather than imposing upon him, the conditions of his rule, which was now more absolute than any Sweden had known. Jean Louis Delolme, discounting fears of a similar royalist coup in Britain, likewise regarded the former Swedish government as "an aristocratical yoke," but considered Gustav now "as absolute as any monarch in Europe." The abbé de Mably, then on the point of publishing his *De la législation,* stoutly maintained that the king of Sweden might "change his country" but not his own book, which based its social ideas upon an idealization of the old Swedish constitution.[40]

Gustav did not take kindly to criticism. His correspondence with Mme de Boufflers languished for over a year and he thereafter no longer asked her views on Swedish affairs, though occasionally she offered them unsolicited. Continued discussion of French politics in his letters nonetheless shows the direction of his political thinking. He consistently takes the part of the French king and his ministers against the *parlements,* which he saw as analogous with the Swedish Estates, and which Mme d'Egmont until her death in 1773, her companion, Mme Feydeau des Mesmes, and Mme de Boufflers until the eve of the Revolution itself, warmly defended. Maupeou, he told his mother, had "rendered to royal authority a greater service than Richelieu." He favored Turgot, while somewhat suspecting him of being "rather the people's man than the king's," for a time Necker, whom he facetiously called Mme de Boufflers' "heretical friend," and even Calonne. He meanwhile discreetly deplored Louis XVI's

[40] Geijer, pp. 154, 238–39; de Luz, p. 93; du Deffand, II, 120, 124, 128; Elovson, pp. 23–31; Abbé Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1st ed., 1770; 2d ed., 1774); [John Louis Delolme], *A Parallel Between the English Constitution and the Former Government of Sweden* (London, 1772), esp. pp. 34, 49; cf. Nyström, p. 15; Sallnäs, p. 30. Coxe, in *Travels,* IV, 98–100, 106, denied that G. was a "despot," even after 1789. Geffroy, I, 222–23.

weakness and indecision, thereby subtly inviting comparison with himself.[41]

Having changed the regime, Gustav dissolved the Riksdag and embarked upon an ambitious program of reforms.[42] Reorganizations and the purge of corrupt and inefficient officials improved the civil administration, the judiciary and military establishments. Councillor Johan Liljencrantz reestablished Sweden's currency on a stable footing. Inspired largely by physiocratic ideas, Gustav and Liljencrantz increased consolidation of peasant landholdings, reclamation and settlement of uncultivated lands, free trade in grain, and suppressed guild restrictions on commerce and manufacture. To encourage merit in agriculture, commerce, mining, and the arts, Gustav established the Order of Vasa. An aspect of economic reform was Gustav's introduction of a new "Swedish dress" in 1778, to restrain luxury and the caprice of fashion, thereby reducing expensive imports while stimulating national pride.[43] For a self-avowed disciple of Voltaire, as deeply affected by the Calas affair as by the witchcraft trials in Åls parish in 1757, reform of penal laws and freedom of religion received high priority. Torture was immediately abolished and penalties for various offenses made more humane; Gustav himself played an important role in these reforms, which reveal Beccaria's influence while going beyond him in their emphasis upon the social rehabilitation of the wrongdoer.[44] Despite clerical protests, he proclaimed limited toleration for non-Lutheran Christians, including Roman Catholics, in 1781. Lovisa Ulrika, much impressed by Moses Mendelssohn while in Berlin in 1771–72, urged toleration of Jews. Gustav, who saw the advantage of having such "industrious people" in Sweden, allowed them to settle in certain towns in 1782.[45] His actions regarding freedom of the press were more ambivalent. Since 1766, Sweden had been notably free in this respect. Gustav's edict of 1774 invoked the ideals of the Enlightenment, especially of the Physiocrats, but actually permitted a tighter censorship, particu-

[41] Vivie, pp. 101–2, 107–8, 112, 117–18, 120–22, 127–28, 139, 143–46, 188, 198, 210–11, 215–16, 348, 385–86; Geffroy, I, 232–39, 276–77, 305–6; Schück, II, 410–14, 418, 421, 455; Geijer, p. 239.

[42] *Ecrits,* I, 210–23; Geijer, pp. 234–37.

[43] Geffroy, I, 316–17. Cf. Ehrensvärd, I, 337–52; Fersen, IV, 5–23.

[44] On G.'s penal reforms, see Erik Anners, *Humanitet och rationalism* (Stockholm, 1965). Cf. Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 8–9; Schück, I, 122, 124; de Luz, pp. 52–54, 97–98.

[45] Schück, II, 84, 132, 135.

larly of criticism directed against the crown itself.[46] Finally, Gustav warmly encouraged all facets of the nation's cultural life.

These reforms were undertaken with an eye to the effect upon enlightened opinion abroad. D'Alembert was impressed by Gustav's judicial reforms. One of the first recipients of the Vasa Order was the elder Mirabeau, the self-styled "Friend of Man," to whom Gustav described himself in 1772 as a disciple of the Physiocrats. In 1776, Mirabeau dedicated his *Supplément à la théorie de l'impôt* to the king in adulatory terms while P.–S. Dupont de Nemours anonymously refuted Delolme's critique of the new Swedish government in 1773. Both sent lengthy memoranda to Stockholm, filled with advice, and their journal, the *Nouvelles éphémérides économiques,* publicized the Swedish reforms and printed Scheffer's justification of the new regime through physiocratic theory. Le Mercier de la Rivière was commissioned by Gustav to write his *De l'instruction publique* (1775), which praised the king for granting "true liberty" and painted a glowing picture of the advance of human progress. Meanwhile, Mirabeau, Dupont, and others of their circle did not fail to importune the king for honors and pecuniary favors.[47] Gustav lost no time in sending his edict on freedom of the press to Voltaire, as "the homage reason renders to humanity," asserting that Sweden now enjoyed greater liberty in this respect than any other country. In March 1778, he sought through Creutz Voltaire's public approval of his "Swedish dress." To the enthusiastic Marmontel, Gustav wrote, "May my reign be that of true philosophy," that which serves "to enlighten sovereigns regarding their duties and peoples on their true happiness."[48] There were, however, limits. Dupont de Nemours had considered the Swedish ordinance on press freedom of 1766 superior even to Britain's; the silence of the *philosophes* on this point after 1774 shows that they were not misled by Gustav's edict.[49]

[46] *Ecrits,* I, 234–40; Boberg, passim, esp. pp. 17, 39–42, 65–70, 75–76, 343; de Luz, pp. 102–3.

[47] D'Alembert, V, 447–78; Boberg, pp. 37–40; Heckscher, pp. 10–11; Nyström, pp. 14–15; Sirén, pp. 44, 54–65; Geffroy, I, 312–16; P.F.J.H. Le Mercier de la Rivière, *De l'instruction publique* ("Stockholm" [actually Paris], 1775), esp. pp. 10–13; [P.–S. Dupont de Nemours], *Lettre à M. le comte Charles de Scheffer* (Paris, 1773). Cf. C. F. Scheffer, "Discours économique au Roi de Suède et à son Académie des sciences, sur le Bonheur des Peuples et sur les Loix fondamentales des Etats," *Nouvelles éphémérides économiques* (1774), pp. 18–53.

[48] Geffroy, I, 221–22, 309–12; Palme, pp. 20–21; Boberg, p. 42; Geijer, p. 237.

[49] Boberg, pp. 39, 60–61.

Beginning in 1778, Gustav underwent a deep personal crisis. Since his coup, he had placed great hopes in the popularity of his reform program. His first Riksdag under the new regime, he wrote Mme de Boufflers, should "be of great importance for my reputation and for posterity," since it would give "a final sanction to all that was established in 1772, a free sanction and without any remonstrance."[50] The Riksdag of 1778–79, however, proved disillusioning, revealing criticism of Gustav's regime and opposition to proposed religious and penal reforms. Symptoms of discontent among various elements of society thereafter continued to mount. The American Revolution provided an issue with which the more radical opposition belabored the government, and Gustav's feelings toward his opponents at home are reflected in his personal distaste for the American rebels.[51]

No less distressing was the bitter conflict between Gustav and his mother, which, long submerged, came to the surface in 1778, when Lovisa Ulrika accepted and spread the rumor that Crown Prince Gustav Adolf, born that year, was not Gustav's son. This led to a break never really mended until the dowager's death in 1782.[52]

These disillusionments manifested themselves in tense, nervous behavior, and surely affected Gustav's attitude toward the *philosophes* and their doctrines. His criticisms did not begin suddenly. He had experienced some disenchantment with the philosophers already in Paris in 1772, as seen. Of Chastellux's *De la félicité publique* (1772), he wrote his mother in 1773 that "one cannot agree that the execution would be as easy as the ideas are honorable for mankind and useful to its happiness," while the same year, though he read Helvétius' *De l'homme* (1772) with "much pleasure," he found in it "dangerous and destructive maxims, tending to the overthrow of all those barriers which up to the present have been raised to restrain men's desires." Other criticisms follow, while Lovisa Ulrika complained increasingly of the "dearth" of good literature.[53] But it is

[50] Vivie, pp. 120–21.

[51] See my "Sweden and the War of American Independence," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 23 (1966), esp. 419–27.

[52] See O. Jägerskiöld, *Lovisa Ulrika*, pp. 262–78. Cf. *Ecrits*, IV, 111–14.

[53] Schück, II, 307–8, 413–14, 472, 534.

above all from 1778 on that Gustav reveals a growing disillusionment with the Parisian philosophic world. "I envy you the pleasure of being with Mme de Boufflers," he wrote that year to a Swedish officer in Paris. "It is only she and a few friends I believe myself to have in France which make me wish to see Paris again; all I have been told otherwise gives me infinite disgust. No more decency, no more politeness. Those amiable French, have they forgotten that they formerly were the models in these things?" To Mme de Boufflers, he finds fault with Turgot, in retrospect, and with Necker. He complains in 1778 that the principles of the "Economists" are "too general"; that they wished to measure all by the same yardstick, which was possible in small states but in larger ones was "as impossible to put into practice as harmful to try." Philosophy which "generalizes everything," he writes in 1782, "has diminished enthusiasm, and it is meanwhile only through enthusiasm that one can rouse oneself to great deeds," an idea evidently deriving largely from Helvétius and Pietro Verri which thereafter would increasingly captivate him. He expresses growing resentment toward the philosophers' influence over public opinion, and in 1784 complains bitterly of the "philosophic-democratic spirit that prevails and which is so incompatible with my principles and interests." Mme de Boufflers meanwhile shows similar reactions, blaming "modern philosophy" for the present lack of religion, morals, discipline, and social distinctions in France.[54]

Gustav III's time was one not only of sense but of sensibility. Around 1779–1780, he went through a phase when he was much drawn to the mysticisms of Swedenborgianism and Freemasonry.[55] In 1780, he visited Spa in the Austrian Netherlands, where he associated with cosmopolitan high society, including Mmes de Boufflers and de La Marck, but sought no contact with the philosophers. The following spring, a Swedish informant in Paris warned him that "the

[54] *Ecrits,* IV, 266–67; Vivie, pp. 107–12, 115–18, 139, 145, 198–201, 206, 210–11, 215–16, 221, 245, 254, 320. On G.'s preoccupation with the role of the passions, see *Ögonvittnen,* p. 220; Delblanc, *Ära och minne,* pp. 191–94, 224–34; Lars Gustafsson, review of Delblanc, *Ära och minne,* in *Samlaren* (1965), pp. 184–94.

[55] *Ögonvittnen,* pp. 139–40, 153–54; Elis Schröderheim, *Skrifter till konung Gustaf III:s historia,* ed. Elof Tegnér, 2nd. ed., (Stockholm, 1892), pp. 78–98, 181–205 passim; Fersen, III, 255–56; IV, 206–10; Geffroy, II, 253–60. On these pietistic and secular mysticisms, see Martin Lamm, *Upplysningstidens romantik,* 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1918–20).

interest previously taken in your person and your country in general has visibly diminished" since the Spa sojourn and that various influential ladies were now distinctly hostile. It was evidently during this journey, too, that Gustav allegedly sought out a German Freemason named Zinnendorf, to whom he repented having shared the doctrines of the "Encyclopedists" and expressed hopes of finding the "light" through the "new science." His emissaries contacted other reputed seers, including Cagliostro in Paris.[56] From 1780 on, however, Gustav began to drift away from his passing absorption in religion and spiritualism, apparently under the eminently rationalistic influence of his new favorite, Baron Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, though he retained a certain interest in the prophecies of the clairvoyant, Ulrika Arfwidsson, until his death.[57]

From the fall of 1783 until the following summer, Gustav, accompanied by a suite of courtiers and scholars, made an extended incognito visit to Italy and France, involving both culture and diplomacy.[58] The king visited the Italian capitals, admired the monuments of art and architecture, met Leopold of Tuscany and his brother, Emperor Joseph II, himself traveling incognito in Italy. He somewhat ostentatiously called upon Pope Pius VI and attended a Christmas mass at St. Peter's to publicize his toleration of Catholics in Sweden, though privately he commented on this situation with his accustomed Voltairian irony toward the Catholic faith.[59]

In Italy, the king noted receiving a book from a "M. Maistre," whom he duly rewarded; probably the *Discours prononcé par les gens du roi à la rentrée du sénat de Savoie* (1784), in which Joseph de Maistre already denounced the "destructive spirit" of the century.[60] As the time approached to continue to Paris, Gustav showed increasing uneasiness regarding the *philosophes*. Already in 1781

[56] Geffroy, II, 2–4; Vivie, pp. 153, 160–61; Hennings, *G. och grevinnan de Boufflers,* pp. 147–55; P. U. Lilljehorn to G., 19 April 1781, P. U. Lilljehorns arkiv, Riksarkivet, Stockholm.

[57] Hennings, *Gustav III,* p. 176.

[58] On this voyage, see Henning Stålhane, *Gustaf III:s resa till Italien och Frankrike* (Stockholm, 1953); Elof Tegnér, *Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt,* 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Stockholm, 1892–94), I, 74–132; Axel von Fersen the younger's letters to his father in Fersen, V, 302–17; Geffroy, II, 6–50; G. G. Adlerbeth, *Gustaf III:s resa i Italien,* ed. H. Schück (Stockholm, 1902). Adlerbeth's account is filled with "philosophical" reflections on the grandeur that was Rome, popish superstition, etc. Cf. also Vivie, pp. 297–98, 303–6.

[59] Geffroy, II, 16–18, 20, 417–18; Fersen, V, 304; Tegnér, *Armfelt,* I, 96; Stålhane, p. 105. On G.'s private attitude toward Catholicism, see Schück, II, 425.

[60] Geffroy, II, 413–14.

he had complained to Mme de Boufflers that "these learned gentlemen have taken possession of Fame's trumpet," and went on to deplore, like his mother not long before, the lack of recent good books from France. He now wrote that if he could avoid the philosophers, he would "with all my heart," for one always risked being looked at askance in their company.

> These gentlemen want to dominate everything. They have pretensions of governing the whole world and cannot govern themselves; they speak of intolerance and are more intolerant than the entire College of Cardinals, and still it is their opinion that determines reputations and transmits them to posterity.[61]

Still, being in France again felt like returning home, Gustav wrote Creutz. He reveled in the Paris theater and the court spectacles at Versailles, watched the ascent of a balloon, visited the French Academy and a Mesmerist séance. At the *Parlement,* Advocate General Séguier pointedly praised Sweden's "wise and pacific government, distant equally from anarchy and despotism." Gustav negotiated a renewed alliance and hobnobbed with Mme de Boufflers.[62] Creutz had meanwhile urged the king to show due regard for the *gens de lettres,* yet it did not escape notice that he showed a studied indifference toward them and the younger salon society in general. To Scheffer, the elder Mirabeau wrote plaintively of his cold reception by the king.[63]

Once back in Sweden, Gustav learned of the criticisms against him in Paris. His "strong passion" for pleasure, his new ambassador there, Erik Magnus Staël von Holstein, forthrightly reported, was considered hard to reconcile with the burdens of conscientious government.[64] Gustav's relations with the philosophic party were clearly in decline. There was nonetheless no definitive break, as shown by his favor toward Beaumarchais. Gustav had known his work since his first play in 1767 but it was in Paris in 1784 that he first met Beaumarchais, who wrote a Swedish friend that the king fulfilled his ideal of "those Fate has chosen to rule over others." The playwright

[61] Vivie, pp. 198–201, 320.

[62] Geijer, pp. 411–12; Fersen, V, 217–18, 226–30, 317; Bachaumont, XXVI, 31–113, passim; *Correspondance littéraire,* XIII, 537–59, passim; Geffroy, II, 21–50; Tegnér, *Armfelt,* I, 121–31.

[63] Fersen, V, 226–27; Geijer, p. 403*n.*; Sirén, pp. 45–46.

[64] Vivie, pp. 338–39; *Ögonvittnen,* pp. 229–30.

was then in need of an influential protector. His *Mariage de Figaro* was banned from the stage and he was thereafter briefly imprisoned. From Sweden, Gustav gave discreet encouragement and in May 1785 allowed the play's successful performance in Swedish in Stockholm. The same year, Beaumarchais sent Gustav the magnificent Kehl edition of Voltaire's works, of which he was co-editor.[65] Figaro's impertinences were perhaps not out of harmony with the king's growing exasperation with high aristocratic opponents in Sweden.

It is worth noting too that in 1784 Gustav appointed Nils Rosén von Rosenstein, an outspoken defender of the Enlightenment, preceptor to his son, Crown Prince Gustav Adolf, a position he held until after the king's death. On his way home from Paris that year, Gustav visited Rousseau's tomb at Ermenonville; the influence of *Emile* seems evident in his description soon after to Mme de Boufflers of his son's education. This differed from that of other children, "who are made into small pedants to do honor to their teachers," in that he was taught only to read and write, and "all he says and does comes from himself," resulting in his great "naturalness." Mme de Boufflers had once been Rousseau's protectress but had become disillusioned with him, especially after the publication of his *Confessions* in 1782. She hoped the prince would learn Latin, for "Latin and Greek are the key to all knowledge and the source of all original ideas as well as of great sentiments." Gustav replied that the boy would not fail to study Latin, which he constantly regretted not knowing himself. The exchange shows well how both turned increasingly to the past for the inspiration they could no longer find in the new philosophy.[66]

To foreign visitors, such as William Coxe and Francisco de Miranda, Gustav continued to point out the enlightened benefits of his reign: hospitals, prisons, dockyards, and canals. But his cultural preferences were now more than ever aesthetic.[67] The Swedish Acad-

[65] Schück, I, 109; *Ögonvittnen,* p. 229; Vivie, pp. 353, 359–60, 384; Geffroy, II, 420.

[66] Vivie, pp. 115, 254, 341, 357, 359. On Rosenstein, see Alma Söderhjelm, *Sverige och den franska revolutionen,* 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1920–24), I, 166, 239–41; II, 265–68.

[67] Coxe, *Travels,* IV, 67; [Francisco de Miranda], *Miranda i Sverige och Norge 1787* (Stockholm, 1950), pp. 136–37. Cf. William Coxe, *Account of the Prisons and Hospitals in Russia, Sweden and Denmark* (London, 1781), pp. 31–45. Coxe visited Sweden a second time in 1787. That G. continued to make propaganda abroad in justification of his regime is shown by Olof von Feilitzen in "Carl Fredrik Nordenskiölds teckning av berömda svenskar 1784. Ett kapitel ur den svenska utlandspropagandans historia," *Personhistorisk tidskrift,* 44 (1946), 25–39.

emy, which he founded in 1786, with Rosenstein as its permanent secretary, was dedicated to cultivation of the Swedish language and the memory of great compatriots. His own dramatic authorship, in collaboration with Johan Henrik Kellgren and Carl Gustaf af Leopold—themselves leading representatives of the Swedish Enlightenment—was animated by the same Plutarchian ethos of stimulating patriotism and great deeds in emulation of past heroes.[68] It is incidentally of interest that, from 1787 to 1792, the task of reporting on the Paris social and literary scene fell mainly to his ambassador's wife, Mme de Staël.[69]

"If kings met more often," Gustav had written his uncle, Frederick II, in 1771, "this would perhaps be both to their own and to their subjects' benefit." Perhaps. But Gustav III's own relations with contemporary enlightened despots may be instructive here. Though he surely admired Frederick, the latter's close relations with Russia and support for Lovisa Ulrika in her quarrel with Gustav prevented cordial relations. Yet the similarity between them is in many ways striking, as Gustav himself and others were aware in his later, disillusioned years.[70] Though he claimed good relations with the Habsburgs, toward whom he privately affected amused condescension, his hauteur and pretentiousness repelled Leopold of Tuscany and Joseph II who passed their distaste on to Marie-Antoinette. To Joseph, the king of Sweden was a *"fanfaron et petit-maître manqué."*[71] With his cousin, Catherine II, whom Gustav visited in 1777 and 1783, his relationship passed through various phases, from sentimental amiability to scornful enmity, depending upon political circumstances.[72] He early became disillusioned with the spineless Stanislaus Poniatowski of Poland and felt only contempt

[68] *Ögonvittnen,* pp. 257–61; *Ecrits,* I, 1–14. Cf. Gustafson, pp. 136–42; Delblanc, *Ära och minne,* pp. 191–94, 224–34, 244–45; Gustafsson, review of Delblanc, pp. 190–92; Olle Holmberg, *Leopold och Gustav III 1786–1792* (Stockholm, 1954).

[69] Geffroy, I, 385; II, 430–61, passim; Söderhjelm, I, 87–88; Vivie, pp. 368–69, 372.

[70] De Luz, p. 49. See Lovisa Ulrika's correspondence with Frederick II and Prince Henry of Prussia in Fersen, III, IV, appendixes, passim. Note also G.'s comments to Miranda in October 1787 (Miranda, p. 137); cf. *Ögonvittnen,* p. 317.

[71] Geijer, pp. 370, 373, 390–91, 394; Vivie, pp. 285, 304–6, 317–18; *Ecrits,* IV, 367; Alfred, Ritter von Arneth, ed., *Joseph II und Leopold von Toscana. Ihr Briefwechsel,* 2 vols. (Vienna, 1872), I, 177–79, 191–92; Fersen, V, 229–30.

[72] Ya. K. Grot, *Yekaterina II i Gustav III* (St. Petersburg, 1877); Alfred, Ritter von Arneth, ed., *Joseph II und Katarina von Russland. Ihr Briefwechsel,* 2 vols. (Vienna, 1869), II, 315–17; Catherine's letters to Grimm, in *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoricheskago obshchestva,* 148 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1867–1916), XXIII; Vivie, pp. 112–13. Cf. my "Russia and the Problem of Sweden-Finland," pp. 444–50.

for the unstable autocrat, Christian VII of Denmark-Norway, who in his day had drawn praise from the Paris philosophers, but whom Gustav considered a slave in his own court. Johann Friedrich Struensee, Denmark's enlightened "vizier" in 1770–1772, he despised for his "insolence" and "despotism."[73] Gustav appears to have given his most unreserved praise to Pope Clement XIV, for suppressing the Jesuits, restraining the Inquisition, and rising, for the "general good," above the "ancient dogmas of fanaticism" of his vocation.[74]

Gustav III meanwhile became increasingly autocratic as he sought ways of bypassing the constitution and established procedure. After 1779 he progressively circumscribed freedom of the press.[75] The Riksdag of 1786 thus revealed an intensity of opposition for which he was not prepared. He thereafter busied himself with plans for an attack on Russia. For this there were plausible strategic reasons. Yet more was involved. To J. A. Ehrenström, the king complained in the fall of 1787 that he had been young and inexperienced when he had adopted the constitution of 1772 which now caused "embarrassments." Duchess Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta reported him to say, about the same time, "The Swedes seem to have tired of a mild and peaceful regime and to long for stricter treatment. If we had a war, they might become more tractable. And who knows whether they may not someday have their way?"[76]

Opposition to the king involved a number of factors. Among the clergy, bourgeoisie, and peasantry, it was based mainly upon various concrete grievances, which Gustav prudently sought to rectify following the Riksdag of 1786. Throughout society there was also much dissatisfaction of a bluntly philistine kind. "You will find no Voltaire and no bright spirits along your way," Lovisa Ulrika had warned Prince Gustav when he toured the provinces in 1763, ". . . hide

[73] Schück, I, 223, 225, 238; II, 328; Vivie, pp. 116, 178–79; Geijer, pp. 41–43, 409.

[74] Schück, II, 425. G. meanwhile predicted in 1784 the disappearance of the papacy (*Ecrits,* IV, 203).

[75] Boberg, pp. 247–49, 344; Elovson, pp. 33, 42–43, 54–57, 83–84; Geijer, p. 385; *Ecrits,* IV, 190–91; my "Sweden and the War of American Independence," pp. 427–29. Cf. the justification of G.'s press policy in de Luz, pp. 102–3.

[76] *Ögonvittnen,* p. 183; *Hedvig Elisabeth Charlottas dagbok,* II, 182–83. Cf. my "Russia and the Problem of Sweden-Finland."

from them the distaste their manners and conversation will cause you . . . we will laugh at them together when you return." Her ill will was repaid in full to her son. It was she, the diarist Rutger Fredrik Hochschild complained at her death in 1782, who had introduced into Sweden "foreign taste and luxury," who had "encouraged arts and sciences a poor land could better do without," as well as "theism and Voltaire's doctrine"; such were the principles her son continued to follow. Many agreed with such criticisms.[77]

More serious was opposition on ideological grounds, especially among the nobility. This certainly stemmed mainly from old Swedish constitutional traditions.[78] Ideas deriving from the Enlightenment were nevertheless influential. Locke's social contract, Voltaire's condemnation of Charles XII's irresponsible tyranny, Montesquieu's checks and balances, all were well known in Sweden before Gustav's accession. After 1772, the growing opposition drew further sustenance from the attacks of Rousseau, Mably, Raynal, and Paine upon all forms of despotism. The American Revolution, not least in retrospect, stirred their hopes, which were infused with the *Sturm-und-Drang* emotionalism of the rising Pre-Romantic tide.[79]

The explosion came in 1788 when Gustav attacked Russia, then embroiled in a war with Turkey. His attempts to prove Russian provocation deceived no one; it was evident he had violated his own constitution, which forbade offensive war without the consent of the Estates. This provoked open mutiny among the officers of his Finnish army corps, widely supported by the aristocracy as a whole. The rebellious Anjala Confederation, charging breach of social contract, appealed to Catherine II herself and drafted constitutional projects

[77] Schück, I, 8; Rutger Fredrik Hochschild, *Memoarer,* ed. H. Schück, 3 vols. (Stockholm, 1908–9), I, 29, 51–52, 56, 61, 66–70; Fersen, V, 230–31, 242. Cf. Hennings, *Gustav III,* pp. 75, 254–55.

[78] See Michael Roberts, "On Aristocratic Constitutionalism in Swedish History, 1520–1720," and "The Swedish Aristocracy in the Eighteenth Century," in his *Essays in Swedish History* (Minneapolis, 1967).

[79] See Lolo Krusius-Ahrenberg, *Tyrannmördaren C. F. Ehrensvärd* (Helsingfors & Stockholm, 1947), Chaps. i-ii; Olof Dixelius, *Den unge Järta* (Uppsala, 1953), Ch. i; Stig Jägerskiöld, "Tyrannmord och motståndsrätt 1792–1809," *Scandia* (1962); Elovson; Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 47–50; Göran Gudmund Adlerbeth, *Historiska anteckningar,* ed. Elof Tegnér, 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1892–93), I, 192; J. A. Ehrenström, *Statsrådet Johan Albert Ehrenströms efterlämnade Historiska anteckningar,* ed. S. J. Boëthius, 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1883), I, 29–31; Boberg, p. 179. For the opposition in Finland, see esp. Bruno Lesch, *Jan Anders Jägerhorn,* (Helsingfors, 1941), Chaps. iii-iv. On the relationship between the Enlightenment and Pre-Romantic emotionalism, see esp. Lamm, *Upplysningstidens romantik.*

aimed at curbing royal power.[80] In despair, Gustav considered abdicating and settling in France. To J. J. Oxenstierna, he grieved that all his reforms for the public good had gone for naught.[81]

Denmark now declared war in accordance with her Russian alliance; yet what should have been the final blow proved Gustav's salvation. He could turn to rallying the defense in Sweden, where with spectacular success he played upon both the danophobic and the anti-aristocratic passions of the mass of his subjects. The Danes were repelled; the nobility isolated, branded with treason. In the winter of 1789, Gustav called a Riksdag at which, supported by the three lower Estates, and by patently unconstitutional means, he forced through an Act of Union and Security which amended the constitution, giving the crown widely increased powers in return for the abolition of most noble privileges. The Act created a high degree of social mobility and free circulation of property some weeks before the Estates-General convened in France; it was epoch-making in the evolution of modern Swedish society.[82]

Thereafter, Gustav devoted as much effort as the war with Russia allowed to rationalizing the central administration.[83] It appears that from the beginning he considered the Act of Union a temporary expedient. He told P. O. von Asp in 1789 that Sweden's present situation allowed no solution except "full power to the king"; yet admitted that if the country should not have a "king"—one equal to his task—he could conceive its eventually becoming a "republic." He was already thinking of reorganizing the Noble Estate or even the entire Diet, and during the next three years continued to speculate over constitutional changes. "I have renounced the French and France since she became oligarchic, republican," he wrote in October 1789. "For a republican [system], I prefer the English." At the end of 1791, he immersed himself in the study of British institutions,

[80] See my "Russia and the Problem of Sweden-Finland," pp. 448–49. The various manifestoes of the Anjala Confederation are given in the original Swedish, French, and German in A. R. Cederberg, *Anjalan liiton historialliset lähteet* (Helsinki, 1931). See also Adlerbeth, I, 43–44; S. J. Boëthius, ed., *Bihang till Minnen ur Sveriges nyare historia,* 3 vols. (Uppsala, 1880–83), I, 38–41; S. Jägerskiöld, "Tyrannmord," p. 132; Lesch, Ch. vi.

[81] *Ögonvittnen,* pp. 273–76.

[82] See esp. Sten Carlsson, *Ståndssamhälle och standspersoner 1700–1865* (Lund, 1949), pp. 254–57; Landberg, pp. 35–36; *Ecrits,* I, 139–62.

[83] Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 73–78. In this, the Prussian minister, A. von Borcke, was an influential advisor (ibid.)

particularly through Delolme's *Constitution de l'Angleterre* (Geneva edition, 1790).[84] When financial pressures compelled him to convene a Riksdag at Gävle in January 1792, he planned another coup to establish a new constitution, based on the English. This, it appears, would have created a bicameral legislature, with an upper house of 24 *"jarls,"* elected by the nobility, and a lower house of 240, elected by the "people," with substantial property qualifications for both. The king would "communicate" with this legislature through ministers heading specialized government departments. The plan was farsighted and ambitious, anticipating the basic administrative and representational reforms of the nineteenth century in Sweden. The atmosphere at the Riksdag, however, persuaded Gustav to defer the idea.[85]

By mid-1790, Gustav managed to end the Russian war without loss. He had meanwhile long been deeply concerned over the situation in France. He was disturbed by the Assembly of Notables of 1787, for, as he wrote Mme de Boufflers, he knew by experience the ways of "such assemblies," where "they used big words but generally are moved only by personal feelings." His determined action against the aristocratic Anjala mutineers of 1788 was fortified by his reaction to the contemporary noble revolt in France and he thereafter repeatedly compared his own firm behavior with Louis XVI's fatal weakness and irresolution.[86] He was quick to see the disturbances as part of a larger pattern of insurrection throughout Europe. "The end of this century is the time of revolutions," he observed in December 1789. He feared a constitution in France like that of Sweden in 1720, which would weaken his traditional ally; worse, though he had stemmed insurrection in 1788, he feared its return to Sweden under the influence of French ideas. He thus ordered Ambassador Staël in Paris to make every effort to oppose the *constitu-*

[84] Ibid., pp. 56–57, 69, 79–85; *DeLaGardiska arkivet,* ed. P. Wieselgren, 20 vols. (Lund, 1843), XVIII, 105–7; Adlerbeth, I, 166–67; Ehrenström, I, 249; C. D. Hamilton, *Anteckningar af en gammal gustavian* (Linköping, 1855), p. 51.

[85] Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 85–94; Hamilton, pp. 52–53; Adlerbeth, I, 229; *Ögonvittnen,* p. 349. The details of G.'s constitutional project of 1791–92 are known only through an anonymous memoir from 1833 (*Ögonvittnen,* p. 349); "A. B—z" [Axel Brusewitz], "Till frågan om Gustaf III:s sista författningsplaner," *Historisk tidskrift* (1912), 210–16.

[86] Vivie, pp. 386, 398; Geffroy, II, 186–87; Söderhjelm, I, 142–43; Hennings, *Gustav III,* p. 234; Adlerbeth, I, 236. Cf. Erland Hjärne, "Gustav III och franska revolutionen," *Svensk tidskrift,* 19 (1929), 502–22; Nils Åkeson, *Gustaf III:s förhållande till den franska revolutionen* (Lund, 1887).

tionnel faction there, to prevent the establishment of a "metaphysical," mixed form of monarchy. No sooner did he make peace with Catherine II than he sought her support in a great monarchical crusade under his own leadership to crush the "epidemic of popular disturbances" which had "spread from the soil of America to France" and which threatened all thrones.[87]

The connection between the Revolution and the Enlightenment seemed clear. The present unrest, he wrote Mme de Boufflers in August 1787,

> . . . is a consequence of this system of innovation our modern philosophers have introduced. It would be most strange if their speculations, which they consider intended for mankind's greatest good, should simply lead to the opposite result and end, in the last analysis, by turning sovereigns—into tyrants, and peoples—into rebels.

He complained in 1788 of the "Anglicizing" of France and the following year of the ruinous counsels of "a minister with democratic ideas"—Necker—"who is a citizen of a small republic and believes the French state can be governed by the same principles as the city of Geneva, principles which moreover have brought even that city to grief." "It is your philosophers," he told G. G. Adlerbeth in December 1789, "a Franklin, a Bailly, a Necker, and the Duc d'Orléans with his intrigues, who have overturned everything." The "real interests" of the French nation, he cautioned Staël in Paris in July 1791—stable tranquillity, security of person and property—were "absolutely incompatible" with "the new constitution, and in general with the principles upon which it is based," which were "impractical" and "chimerical."[88]

Gustav III's projects were cut short by his assassination on 16 March 1792. Though opposition had gone largely underground, the nobility as a whole had never forgiven him his Act of Union of 1789. Since then, handwritten pamphlets had circulated, claiming that since the king had failed in his obligations to the nation, the civil

[87] Vivie, pp. 386–87, 390, 397; Fersen, VII, 189; Geffroy, II, 112, 168–69, 174–75; Söderhjelm, I, 258–59.

[88] Vivie, pp. 386, 408; Adlerbeth, I, 191, 236, 241; Comte de Biörnstierna, ed., *Mémoires posthumes du feldmaréchal comte de Stedingk,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1844–47), I, 137; Söderhjelm, I, 142, 258–59; Holmberg, pp. 185, 320.

authorities were justified in acting against him. A group of officials conspired to change the regime if circumstances should permit. Jacob von Engeström, who had opposed the coup of 1772, drafted the outlines of a constitution featuring a strong council, dependent upon the Diet, and a securely tenured bureaucracy, to limit royal power. He evidently envisioned a unicameral legislature elected by classes based on property ownership, and the opening of all state employments and categories of land to all citizens. The plan reflects much in the political thinking of the Enlightenment and the earlier French Revolution, as well as older Swedish traditions. That its apparent physiocratic emphasis upon property rather than status recalls Gustav III's own last constitutional plans and the Act of Union itself is more than coincidental: principles aside, the aristocratic conspirators realized they must win over the other Estates from the king. The crux of the matter was the power of the crown. As the nobility had already lost most of their privileges, von Engeström and his friends were evidently prepared to consider further sacrifices to restore constitutional freedom.[89]

Though this circle was disinclined to appeal to force, von Engeström could at least theoretically justify tyrannicide in extreme circumstances.[90] Separately, meanwhile, another conspiracy formed which, more violent in its hatred, was prepared to take the ultimate step. Gustav's actual assassin, Captain Johan Jacob ("Jean-Jacques") Anckarström, a man of strong passions and personal grievances, ably defended himself at his trial—as did von Engeström —by accusing the king in Lockean terms of having violated his social contract with the nation.[91] His younger associates, especially Counts

[89] Beth Hennings, "Det gustavianska enväldet," in Ewert Wrangel, ed., *Svenska folket genom tiderna,* VII (Malmö, 1938), 27; Krusius-Ahrenberg, pp. 141–43, 179–81, 187–94; Lolo Krusius-Ahrenberg, "Jacob von Engeström," *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon,* XIII (1950), 615–26; Ludvig Stavenow, "Till diskussionen om Jacob von Engeströms författningsprogram och dess beroende av franska revolutionsidéer," *Uppsala universitets årsskrift* (1923), Program 4, 17 pp. (unnumbered); Ludvig Stavenow, "Jacob von Engeströms förslag till regeringsform och kungamördarnes författningsprogram," in *Studier tillägnade Harald Hjärne* (Stockholm, 1908), pp. 443–76; Fredrik Lagerroth, "Var det von Engeströmska författningsförslaget reaktionärt?" *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* (1936), 303–39, 403–35; Carlsson, *Ståndssamhälle,* p. 259; Geffroy, II, 277; Dixelius, p. 43*n*. Note also the similarity to G.'s ideas from 1789 on to those of the radical journalist, Josias Cederhjelm, in 1780 (Knut Hagberg, "Missnöjets skiftningar," in *Svenska folket genom tiderna,* VII, 379–80).

[90] S. Jägerskiöld, "Tyrannmord," p. 135.

[91] Ibid., passim, esp. pp. 117, 137–56; Krusius-Ahrenberg, p. 20; Ludvig Stavenow, "Johan Jacob Anckarström," *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon,* I (1918), 610–14.

Adolf Ribbing and Claës Horn, and C. A. Ehrensvärd, went further: they were passionate admirers of the radical Enlightenment and of the American and French Revolutions, and romantic votaries of a cult of genius and antique virtue. Their ideals, nebulous though they might be, were complete social equality and popular sovereignty, and they despised Gustav as much for his designs against the Revolution in France as for his despotism in Sweden. The king was in their eyes a modern Tiberius or Nero, their "tyrannicide" a high-minded sacrifice on the altar of liberty.[92]

The king's death came as a profound shock to the Swedish people, including the great majority of the old aristocratic opposition. If Gustav himself had already grown weary of much that it contained, his death—seen against the backdrop of mounting excesses in France—struck a grievous blow to the bright faith of the Enlightenment in Sweden.[93] A few stout souls sought to revindicate the *philosophes* by disassociating them from fanaticism and revolution.[94] But Gustav III's passing cleared the way for the "Iron Age" of Gustav IV Adolf which followed.

Gustav III's relationship to the Enlightenment may perhaps best be evaluated in terms of the degree to which he may be regarded as an "enlightened despot." Certainly few of his contemporaries on Europe's thrones were as familiar as he with the thought of their times nor, initially at least, so impressed by it. Still, if he was "enlightened," was he an "enlightened despot"?

His enemies accused him of creating the greatest despotism Sweden had ever known. Yet, much as he strengthened royal authority in 1772 and 1789, Gustav was never a complete autocrat in the juridical sense. His weakness, Sten Carlsson has pointed out, lay in his having to contend with more vigorous constitutional traditions and more dynamic social developments in Sweden than, for instance, Frederick II or Joseph II had to face.[95] A stronger case may be made

[92] Krusius-Ahrenberg, Chaps. i-ii, passim; Dixelius, pp. 58–66; Stavenow, "Jacob von Engeströms förslag," pp. 446–47.

[93] See, for instance, *Hedvig Elisabeth Charlottas dagbok,* III, 228–29, 333–34, 376–77, 439.

[94] Söderhjelm, I, 239–41; Elovson, pp. 77–78.

[95] Carlsson, *Svensk historia,* II, 216.

for Gustav's "enlightened despotism" on the basis of practical reforms carried through in the face of widespread apathy or hostility; for example, religious toleration, the reform of penal laws, above all the leveling of privileges in 1789. Perhaps "enlightened despotism" was no less obstructed in Russia, Austria, or even Prussia by problems of size, heterogeneity, and social backwardness. Thus Gustav's practical record remains impressive. No eighteenth-century monarch or minister entirely fulfills the ideal of the "enlightened despot," yet the ideal was a potent one at the time. Was it Gustav III's?

Considering his ever-exalted conception of royal authority, it would be easy to conclude that it was. Yet the picture is more complex. It could be argued, for instance, that Gustav became less "enlightened" as he became more "despotic." His progressive disenchantment with the philosophic party is evident from an early date. Beth Hennings has indeed asserted that he was not basically "philosophically inclined," that he was by nature more romantic than rationalist.[96] Certainly to understand him one must seek to unravel a shifting complex of ideas and sentiments deriving from the medieval chivalric ethic, from the Epicurianism, Stoicism, and lust for glory of Antiquity as variously transmitted through the Renaissance and Baroque traditions and the neoclassicism of his own day, from the Pre-Romantic awakening, from changing conjunctures, and from his own enigmatic personality, as much as—often more than—from the new philosophy. Both Gustav's kingly office (*métier du roi*) and his romantic sensibilities always counteracted in part the influence of the Enlightenment. As a monarch, he was convinced of the decisive role, for good or for evil, of the ruling prince in the life of his people, and he exalted national solidarity, loyalty, and social harmony, qualities he perceived in the reigns of his ideal models, Henry IV and Louis XIV in France, Gustav Vasa and Gustav II Adolf in Sweden; he was thus naturally mistrustful toward basic social criticism.[97] As a romantic, he saw noble "enthusiasm" as the source of great deeds. He was clearly attracted to various of the *philosophes,* such as Voltaire, Marmontel, and Beaumarchais, largely in their capacities as playwrights or as historians in the heroic manner. Voltaire he praises in 1770 not only as "Corneille's and Racine's equal" but, in the same sentence, as the lifelong apostle of

[96] Hennings, *G. som kronprins,* p. 170; Hennings, *Gustav III,* p. 141.
[97] Cf. Almén, pp. 43–45, 51–53.

"unity and concord."[98] His undeniable fascination with Rousseau, so unlike him in political and cultural values, surely lies in the latter's revindication of ennobling emotion.

Gustav's criticisms were, however, directed more toward certain philosophers and their uncritical admirers—or toward "false" or "misguided" philosophy— than toward philosophy as such.[99] Concerning the "Swedish dress," he had proclaimed in 1778:

> It is philosophy itself which I call to my aid; not that dangerous philosophy which teaches one to despise everything, to deliver up good sense to ridicule, which creates sects, and which, to dominate alone, overturns all that is respectable; I call upon that benevolent philosophy which clears away all harmful prejudices, all those petty considerations which are opposed to the execution of the most important projects, [which] delights in conceiving or encouraging every bold enterprise that tends to the general good.[100]

Such was the "true philosophy" he had written Marmontel in 1774 he hoped his regime would exemplify. Considering the growing radicalism of the Enlightenment during the 1780s, Gustav's position does not seem so inconsistent. In fundamental ways he remains throughout a man of the Enlightenment, showing above all the lasting influences of Voltaire, Le Mercier de la Rivière, and Montesquieu.[101]

True to Voltaire, he remains at once rational and empirical, free from the "prejudices" of the past and the "spirit of system," while his humane concern for suffering and deprivation is not diminished by his obvious political opportunism.[102] He never falls back on divine

[98] De Luz, p. 53.

[99] See, for instance, Adlerbeth, I, 191, 236. Even during the French Revolution his criticisms remain moderate compared, say, with Catherine II's. Cf. her letters to Grimm in *Sbornik,* XXIII. G.'s pronouncements against "philosophy" after 1788–1789 may well have been intended largely for the consumption of certain politically influential clerics; persons such as Rosenstein meanwhile continued freely to defend the *philosophes* at the court itself. See Holmberg, pp. 185, 320.

[100] *Ecrits,* I, 222.

[101] The great modern syntheses, by Odhner (1885–1905), Stavenow (1925), and Hennings (1957; new ed. 1967), have all sought to explain the apparent contradictions of G.'s life and reign by stressing a break in his attitudes and behavior during the crisis years, 1778–1782. Recently, both Sten Carlsson, in *Ståndssamhälle,* and Stig Boberg in *G. och tryckfriheten,* have, in more specialized studies and in different respects, perceived underlying consistencies, as I do here in this connection.

[102] The view, represented by F. Lagerroth, S. Boberg, S. Delblanc, and others, that G.'s enlightened stance was only a hypocritical pose, a "salon liberalism," in Lagerroth's words, for the sake of effect, is unduly simplistic. Cf. Fredrik Lagerroth,

or supernatural sanctions. His justifications for his regime are always those of utility, with underlying implications of a de facto social contract, as shown by his constant, intense concern with public opinion, at home and abroad. Not that he could condone the deposition of kings, as his reactions to the American and French Revolutions make clear; but he is unsparing in his criticisms of weak, ineffectual monarchs such as Stanislaus Poniatowski, Christian VII, or Louis XVI.

Throughout his reign he meanwhile wavers between Le Mercier de la Rivière's "legal despotism" and Montesquieu's conception of "monarchy."[103] He is early drawn to Le Mercier, deriving from him his lasting formula for the "true interests" of peoples—"liberty, security, property"—which he repeats in his edict on freedom of the press in 1774 and expresses as "the true freedom of peoples, which is the security of persons and property," in a letter to Staël in December 1791.[104] Gustav is, however, also attracted for both sentimental and practical reasons to Montesquieu's ordered, hierarchical monarchy, both at the beginning of his reign and at its end—then largely as restated by De Lolme—ultimately perceiving therein a surer means to effective royal authority than theoretical absolutism. He was thus deeply disturbed by the alienation of his nobility in 1788–1789, to the point of claiming to Armfelt that he envied Louis XVI since the Revolution had restored to him the loyalty of the French *noblesse*. "The nobility do not understand me nor do they understand their own interest," he stated early in 1792. "I am the nobles' friend and I cannot be king without a nobility. The king of England has more power than I do under the Act of Security."[105] The *Leitmotif* is ever the search for effective power, surely in Gustav's mind "to do

Konung och adel (Stockholm, 1917), p. 16; Boberg, pp. 34–35, 76; Delblanc, *Ära och minne,* pp. 144–48; S. U. Palme, "Filosofen på tronen," in his *Vår tids hjältar* (Stockholm, 1953), pp. 86–89; Landberg, pp. 121–24. This builds upon the same logical weakness as much recent historiography on enlightened despotism: a kind of moral Gresham's Law, whereby more mundane motives ipso facto invalidate more ideal ones. Surely mixed motives were the rule rather than the exception for eighteenth-century monarchs, no less than for ordinary mortals.

[103] Cf. Odhner, I, 239–40.

[104] *Ecrits,* I, 236; Boberg, p. 41; Åkeson, p. 30. Cf. Le Mercier de la Rivière, *L'Ordre naturel,* pp. 445–46. Note also Montesquieu on liberty and security (*L'Esprit des lois,* Bk. XI, Ch. iii, 6; Bk. XII, Ch. i).

[105] Elof Tegnér, ed., *Gustaf III:s bref till friherre G. M. Armfelt,* Historiska handlingar, XII (Stockholm, 1883), 196; Adlerbeth, I, 191–92, 228–29; Hennings, "G. och författn.," pp. 90, 92, 95; Landberg, pp. 96–97.

good and prevent licence," as he explained to Mme d'Egmont in 1772, whether under the guise of the "enlightened despot" or that of the "patriot king."[106]

Gustav III's reign finally serves to recall that the Enlightenment was complex and many-sided, and that it could serve to inspire not only monarchs but their political opponents as well. In Sweden, powerful weapons were likewise drawn from this great arsenal of ideas, with which to strengthen and defend an ancient tradition of political freedom and to champion newer, more universal conceptions of man's rightful heritage.

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[106] C. F. Sheridan wrote in the second edition of his *History of the Late Revolution in Sweden* (Dublin, 1778) that if G. continued to reign as heretofore "we shall see the wish of my lord Bolingbroke accomplished . . . a patriot King . . ." (Kjellin, p. 338*n*); G.'s addresses to the Gävle Riksdag of 1792 seem once again to point to this conception (*Ecrits,* I, 173–74, 176). On G.'s flexibility regarding political forms, see his comment from 1787 on the dangers of holding "one-sidedly" to a "set plan of government" (*Hedvig Elisabeth Charlottas dagbok,* II, 180).