

## H-France Forum

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Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror. Virtue, Friendship, and Authenticity in the French Revolution*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. x + 323 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, and index. ISBN: 9780199576302 (cl). US\$99.00.

Reply by Marisa Linton, Kingston University

I want to thank the editors of *H-France* for having selected *Choosing Terror* for this forum. I also want to express my gratitude to the four historians who contributed, all distinguished specialists of the Revolution, who read my work with care and, for the most part, with generosity and enthusiasm. Three of the four found much of value in my book; they also raised interesting questions and points for further reflection. For that scholarly engagement I thank them. The fourth evidently disliked my book, but the Terror has always been a subject that provokes strong reactions, and criticism too can be revealing, though not always in the way that its author intended.

I am very grateful to Jennifer Heuer for her insightful and even-handed analysis. Her lucid exposition is attentive to each of the book's successive arguments, showing how these layers of argument should be understood in relation to one another. Guillaume Mazeau, who has himself been working on political transitions and the problem of stabilizing politics after a revolution, pays special attention to my discussion of "agency," and the difficulties confronted by revolutionary politicians who were trying to forge a new kind of politics, and I found his comments interesting. Michel Biard's thoughtful analysis is of particular value, for it goes to the heart of the book's climactic stages, during the Year II. Biard's appreciation of my work is particularly welcome as he has himself been researching the parallel theme of deputies who died a violent death during the Convention and is shortly to publish a book on the subject. His review situates the experiences of the revolutionary leaders (the protagonists of *Choosing Terror*) within the wider context of the Convention as a whole and, thus, gives me fresh perspectives on the implications of my own work. Jennifer Heuer, Michel Biard, and Guillaume Mazeau provide perceptive accounts of many of the themes of my book, which formed part of the experience of revolutionary politics: virtue, friendship, authenticity, deception, conspiracy, corruption, ambition, fear, agency, identity, and politics as ideology, strategy, and inter-personal relationships.

Let us start with the issue of complexity. All parties (except perhaps the fourth reviewer, Donald Sutherland) agree that I have written a complex book. Mazeau thinks that I may have tried to say too much and admits that my book left him at times feeling "un peu désorienté." I do not deny that my book is both complex and—in the sense that it sets out to say something new about that most vexed subject, the French revolutionary Terror—ambitious. I have been researching and teaching the French Revolution and its ideological origins for over twenty-five years now, so this book is the summation of a great deal of research and reflection. It was a conscious decision on my part not to base my book on a single overarching explanatory theory, for example to say, as so many have done, that any single ideology—or even the ideology of virtue—*caused* the Terror. Perhaps most importantly I was troubled by the Furetian notion that the revolutionary leaders were somehow just prisoners of a discourse. Had I done so it would have made life easier for both myself and the reviewers, but would have made for what to my mind would have been a far less interesting and less accurate book, one open to charges of teleology and reductionism. Rather, I decided to write *Choosing Terror* as an open text exploring the successive ideological, tactical, and personal dilemmas that led people in the extraordinary circumstances of revolutionary politics to end up participating in terrible processes; in effect, at a certain moment "choosing terror." I constructed the text around the experience of revolutionary leaders, giving weight to the different dimensions of their political lives—ideological, tactical and personal. I consciously tried to not reduce the thrust of the book to the progress of an ideology studied only through the intellectual utterances of leading revolutionaries; nor to claim that it was *all about* rivalry, faction, and personal egos (though that

certainly played a part); and to make the point that the whole picture looks different if we take into account the private evidence that illuminates both strategies and emotions. Only a multi-layered account can do justice to the present state of studies in these areas and hopefully advance our collective understanding. I was particularly concerned to show how a constraining dialectic emerged between the concept of virtue and the demands of an emerging and problematic revolutionary politics. If the book is complex, it is because the revolutionary leaders, seen from this perspective, were indeed complex. Mazeau suggests I could have gone more deeply into some subjects, such as the extent of Mirabeau's involvement in conspiracy and the secret dealings of Louis XVI. No doubt I could have done so. But a book also has to be readable, and, as Mazeau himself concedes, it would not have been practicable to include further evidence: this is already a long and detailed book.

I accept that the multiple threads of the text may make navigation through it a challenge for readers. Multiple views, such as those in this forum, show us that all of us read a book differently. For these reasons I want to take this opportunity to clarify the book's central questions and discuss their implications. First let me state clearly that the book is not intended to be a general history of revolutionary politics. Neither is it a general history of the Terror, many of which exist and none of which is, or perhaps ever could be, definitive. In reality there were multiple forms of terror. Some historians, above all Jean-Clément Martin, have argued—convincingly in my view—that it is problematic to speak of “the Terror” at all, and that the idea of a “system of terror” was invented retrospectively by the Thermidoreans. So we would be studying an *ex post facto* construct. Certainly the best known, most iconic form of terror was the legalized terror of 1793 to 1794, which was characterized by a series of coercive laws that enabled suspects to be put on trial before special tribunals, of which the best known was the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris. As I discussed in my Introduction, in recent years, Jean-Clément Martin, Annie Jourdan and other historians have claimed that this legalized terror involved some effort to hand out justice—albeit severe justice—based on evidence.<sup>[1]</sup> As Heuer and Biard acknowledge, to a large extent I agree with this argument, at least when it addresses the legalized terror as a whole. But my own subject was not this particular iconic form of terror, but another form not so far singled out for a research analysis. I looked at the genesis of a very specific form of terror—what I call the “politicians’ terror”. I gave it this appellation because it seemed to me to be connected to, but substantially different from, “the Terror”—as well as being an emblematic element of the French Revolution’s history for two centuries, for who has not heard of the deaths of Danton and Robespierre? As such it merited a distinctive approach, one developed in the light of recent work.

In my view, the “politicians’ terror” was the terror that revolutionary leaders meted out to one another, but which is best not subsumed into other general explanations. The revolutionary leaders were of course themselves “subject to terror.” This took two forms. First, revolutionary leaders were liable to arrest under the laws that enabled terror, as successive laws removed their parliamentary immunity and criminalized the “wrong” political opinions. Second, they were subject to the *emotion* of terror. Fears that they could not openly acknowledge—because innocence was meant to be fearless and fear was a sign of consciousness of guilt—increased in intensity, above all during the critical period between March 1793 and July 1794; this fear in turn influenced revolutionary leaders’ choices. Ironically, leaders had much more cause to fear the Terror than most of the Parisian population. A high proportion of the leaders of the Revolution (above all those who either were or had been members of the Jacobin club) died violent deaths, either under the guillotine or by their own hand. The politicians’ terror climaxed in a series of trials and executions of revolutionary leaders during the Year II: the Girondins, the Hébertists/Cordeliers, the Dantonists, and—executed without any form of trial beyond identification before the Revolutionary Tribunal—the Robespierrist. These trials of political factions were some of the most notorious trials of the Revolution. The trial of the Dantonists became one of the most iconic moments of the Revolution and has often been the subject of literary and theatrical retellings. For many observers since the Revolution, the Danton Affair epitomized the dark heart of the French revolutionary Terror. Dramatists and novelists have repeatedly tackled the subject; and it has frequently been equated with show trials under twentieth-century totalitarian dictatorships.

Despite this continued interest, the nature of the factional trials is not well understood. Whilst these trials constituted a travesty of justice for the victims, they were also atypical of the processes of the

Revolutionary Tribunal. In contrast to the vast majority of cases heard by the Revolutionary Tribunal, justice had little to do with the terror that politicians dealt to one another. The trials of political factions during the Year II were among the most ruthlessly manipulated of the whole Revolution. These were trials in which revolutionary leaders actively intervened in the legal process: they initiated the cases, wrote the narratives that criminalized the suspects as “conspirators”, appeared as witnesses, and put pressure on the Tribunal’s officials to secure convictions. The suspects on trial in their turn, when they had the opportunity to speak, talked the same language of virtue, authenticity, and corruption, protesting their own virtuous motives, whilst accusing their accusers of corruption and duplicity. Almost without exception, during the Year II, once a deputy or other leading political figure was sent before the Revolutionary Tribunal, he or she was condemned to death. Again, this contrasts sharply with the figures as a whole for outcomes of trials before the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Why were these trials of political leaders so ruthless? My book explains that a key factor was mutual fear on the part of the protagonists. From April 1793 the deputies of the Convention had no immunity from arrest and could be imprisoned subject only to the agreement of the Convention itself. There was a practice of denunciation, which itself was interwoven with the rhetoric on virtue. Fear was not the only motive for the trials of the factions, of course; it has to be factored in alongside many other motives, ideological, tactical and personal. The revolutionary leaders who put fellow revolutionaries (in many cases former colleagues and friends) on trial were motivated partly by their suspicion of factions and disunity as being “conspiratorial.” In many cases they also acted out of a genuine conviction that political opponents were at best financially and politically corrupt, and at worst in league with the foreign powers. But it was their own fear that made the perpetrators so pitiless in their handling of the factions. They were under pressure from all sides and vulnerable to denunciation themselves, both from the Paris popular militants—the *sans-culottes*—and their leaders and from other deputies in the Convention itself. They were also well aware that if a fellow revolutionary leader returned acquitted from the Revolutionary Tribunal, as Marat had done, then the first thing he was liable to do was use his political power and influence to seek revenge upon the men who had put him there.

Therefore, in writing an analysis of the “politicians’ terror” I found it necessary to coin a new term for a process often confused with or assimilated to the general “Terror,” but which should actually be seen as distinct in many (though not all) ways. This is particularly important because the politicians’ terror involved a series of trials in which justice played little part, that are so often taken as emblematic of not just “the Terror” as a whole, but also of the revolutionary endeavor itself. My point is that it is important to see the politicians’ terror as distinct, with different origins, a different evolution, and different structure. It was not the whole Terror, nor even entirely typical of it.

Moreover, in one important way the politicians’ terror and the fear that underlay it help us to understand aspects of the laws that enabled the broader “Terror.” The majority of the Conventionnels were politically unaligned; they neither sat with the Montagnards nor attended the meetings of the Jacobin Club. Nonetheless they voted for laws on terror. Why did the more moderate deputies—men who afterwards disclaimed any wish to have chosen terror—vote for the laws that enabled it? There were two possible reasons: either at the time and in that extreme situation they agreed with the necessity for those proposed laws; or they voted them under duress, out of fear for themselves. Both those motives played a part. In the first half of 1793 there was considerable agreement with the need for laws to enable terror against the Revolution’s opponents: whatever surviving deputies said afterwards, the laws on terror were a collective choice. The balance of motives changed, however, and after the fall of the Girondins many of the deputies became anxious about their own vulnerability. That fear reached its climax after the fall of the Hébertists and the Dantonists, culminating in June 1794 in the passing of the Law of Prairial, which was meant to simplify and rationalize trial procedures, but which led to the seven weeks of the so-called “Great Terror.” Despite severe misgivings, not least because some of the deputies feared that this new law might be used against them, few deputies dared speak out against it in the Convention. Ironically, the deputies who were most at risk in the politicians’ terror were those who were most politically active, who spoke most in the Convention, attended the clubs, especially the Jacobin Club, and drew attention to themselves by their political commitment. Most of the deputies, if they did not

protest too loudly at the arrest of their fellows, or show overmuch loyalty to friends who were arrested, were left alone. Yet for whatever reason, and if only to not to draw attention to themselves, the deputies—most of them not Jacobins—still “chose terror” in the sense that they voted for the laws. Thus the politicians’ terror had a direct impact on the laws that enabled the legalized terror to take place.

The fact that fear contributed to making revolutionary leaders ruthless was not edifying, nor does it make them “blameless” as Sutherland thinks I am arguing. As Biard says in his concluding comments, it is not the job of the historian to pass judgment on the dead, but to try to understand their lives, their motives, and their experiences, and then leave it to the readers to decide for themselves if blame is appropriate and, if so, where blame lies. The concept of the “politicians’ terror” helps us to make more sense of what otherwise seems so inexplicable. That does not mean that this form of terror against politicians was justified. On the contrary, my study is, if anything, a cautionary tale, the story of how a tragedy unfolded, written to try to understand the unacceptable. If we fail to appreciate that the men who directed terror were also subject to terror (both as a system of laws to which they were subject and as an emotion that they felt) then there is much that we will not understand about the traumatic politics of the Year II.

Subjects can be open-ended and books have to end. *Choosing Terror* did not venture into the period after the fall of Robespierre primarily for reasons of length. Heuer is right to say that I could have gone further into the question of whether the politicians’ terror ended with Thermidor. To take up her point briefly, terror against deputies continued after Thermidor. In some ways it even escalated: the number of killings decreased, but the arrests increased. This is in itself significant and calls into question the standard periodization of “the Terror” and the old argument that Thermidor definitely “put an end to terror”. The routine purging of deputies was intrinsic to the difficulties inherent in setting up a stable form of politics, difficulties that persisted throughout the period of the Convention and beyond it. Yet the political situation after Thermidor was not the subject of my research—a decade of research is probably enough on what was basically a five year period—and I think it appropriate to leave that subject to historians who are in a better position than I am to discuss it—most notably Mette Harder and Michel Biard.<sup>[2]</sup> That is why my figures for the politicians’ terror are “incomplete” as Sutherland puts it.

Heuer regrets that I do not say more about women’s participation in revolutionary politics. I regret it too, but the reality was, as Heuer acknowledges, that hardly any women were involved directly in politics at the level of leadership, excepting of course the inimitable Madame Roland. Women are there in my book, but they remain for the most part shadowy figures.<sup>[3]</sup> They were most visible in the public galleries of the assemblies and the clubs, rowdy in their support of their favorite speakers, especially Robespierre. They are in the Fraternal Society of Two Sexes, in their meeting place beneath the Jacobin Club, where Barnave goes down to court them using the language of virtue, accompanied by the disapproving English spy Williams Miles. We catch glimpses of them when their menfolk are under arrest, fighting for their lives, as when Madame Brissot stonewalls her interrogators, persisting in her story that she just occupied herself with the household, ironed her husband’s shirts, and had no idea who came to the house on political business. A few women stand out clearly on the scaffold, for a brief moment before their lives were snuffed out. One of the most powerful of such images was that of Lucile Desmoulins and Marie Hébert, whose husbands had done so much to destroy one another, embracing at the foot of the guillotine, in defiance of politics, in defiance of death.

Mazeau’s feeling of disorientation when reading my book may account for one or two points he makes in his review which I, in my turn, found confusing. Danton did not present himself as a “champion de la vertu”—far from it, though Brissot and Robespierre certainly did—a divergence in their strategies that my book makes clear. The coup of Thermidor did not eliminate Robespierre “sans violence”—but with extreme violence. Chapters nine and ten of my book are devoted to the political build up to Thermidor, which resulted in the bloody purge of the group around Robespierre, with over 100 victims who perished, without trial, over three days. By setting this build up in a complex longer term context going back to 1789, I hoped to excite some debate over

the question of agency that proves so problematic in attempts to suggest that “the Terror” is inherent in the ideologies of 1789.

Deciding how—and at what point in my narrative—to give a name to groups and factions was a problem with which I was repeatedly faced and to which I responded with a degree of pragmatism and compromise. We all know how groups shift and sometimes defy the usual nomenclature, and only a beginner would unwittingly make crude mistakes here. We all grapple with who was and who was not a Jacobin, a Montagnard, a Girondin, a Brissotin, a Feuillant, a Robespierrist, a Dantonist, a Cordelier, or a Hébertist and all the rest of the endlessly shifting names. An added complication is that many of these names were invented by opposing factions, who used them against their rivals as terms of indictment or abuse. Several of the reviewers picked up on this in different ways. Mazeau was troubled that I used the term “Jacobin” quite loosely and in places where Montagnard would be more accurate. Anyone who works on this period should of course understand his concerns, and there are no points to be scored between professionals. I had two reasons; the first was that I was trying to keep things a little simpler for non-specialist readers. Here I had in mind the many students I have taught who so often struggle to get their heads round the kaleidoscopic changes of name and faction. As I stated in the Introduction, for the sake of non-specialist readers I thought it best to use as few names as possible, and to try to avoid constantly changing them. Sometimes I used labels because to repeatedly write phrases such as “Brissot and the group of vaguely interconnected people, brought together at that moment in part by shared aims, but often more by friendship, with whom he had quite close connections, sometimes for example having dinner with them” reads so awkwardly, though certainly more accurately. I chose instead to call them “Girondins” and get on with the sentence. Opting for the wrong nomenclature only matters if it misleads the reader. I tried repeatedly to make it clear that the factions were endlessly shifting, and that people chose sides—if at all—often very late in the day. That was a key part of my argument. It is very difficult to discuss revolutionary factionalism without having recourse to names as labels, but ironically these very names were often given to individuals retrospectively, by their enemies, as a process of identifying them as part of a faction, hence of a conspiracy. Thus I speak in chapter nine of “the Robespierrists” even while stating explicitly that the existence of “the Robespierrists” as a distinct group was not evident until after their arrest. Even Saint-Just was only definitively defined as a “Robespierrist” by Robespierre’s opponents when he stepped forward to defend Robespierre on 9 Thermidor, and even at that moment Saint-Just was still insisting that he “belonged to no faction.” By using the names of factions we are, in a sense, reading the story backwards—from the point where the revolutionary leaders ended up or where they were placed by their judges when they were condemned to death. I tried to write my narrative forward, to experience the uncertainty of outcome along with the protagonists, as though we did not, as historians, know already how it would end and what identities people would eventually adopt or have imposed upon them. This is why I used the term Jacobin where possible. It is all too easy to forget that the Jacobins were originally one group, welcoming members with diverse views. I wanted to start from that moment and show them changing along the way; to point out that Barnave, the Lameths, Brissot, Robespierre, each had their successive moment of domination in the Jacobin Club. In retrospect the fractures that developed on ideological and factional lines amongst the Jacobins look more apparent now than then, but they were not so evident to Jacobins of 1790, or even 1791. As several reviewers noted, I wanted to emphasize that for a long time the Girondins and the Montagnards were Jacobins together and to explore the processes that drove them apart into opposing factions. The closer one looks, the less important absolute ideological differences seem to have been in that fascinating process of divergence.

Donald Sutherland’s review makes for curious reading. Its approach is very different to that of all the other reviews *Choosing Terror* has received, not only for the forum but the many reviews elsewhere. There is some positive assessment, but it is evident that Sutherland is not much interested in the arguments and ideas in my book, even going so far as to assert, “Ideology or even ideas do very little work in Linton’s schema,” a contention that contrasts with the other reviewers, all of whom devote considerable space to the role of ideas in my book, particularly the ideology of virtue. In view of Sutherland’s own empirical approach I take the criticism as ironic. Of course it will not do to say, if this is what he means, that terror was all the consequence of ideology, and that is precisely why I made a more complex argument. It soon becomes apparent that his real concern is

twofold—first, whether I have said enough on the provincial terror, and, second, my sympathy for Robespierre, which he considers to be excessive.

The provincial terror is of course Sutherland's own specialism and a very important topic as I stated in *Choosing Terror*'s Introduction—but it is not the subject of my book. Sutherland is correct, of course—if a little patronizing—to point out that the revolutionary leaders did not act in isolation from provincial contexts. Recent and not so recent research does indeed suggest that the kinds of tensions and dynamics seen in the politicians' terror in Paris were also played out elsewhere at a local level and in a changing but specific local context.<sup>[4]</sup> Sutherland says I could have said more about certain deputies: Collot d'Herbois (he has 12 separate entries in *Choosing Terror*'s index), Fouché (3 separate entries), Fréron (9 separate entries), and Barras (3 separate entries). It is true that I do not discuss Carrier, but Sutherland more than makes up for this lamentable omission in his own review. Again, no doubt I could have done more to show the interconnections between Paris and the provinces, but not without writing a much longer or indeed a different book. I venture to hope my study will prompt others to explore some of these issues. I would have particularly liked to have had the space to discuss the experiences on mission of some of the leading revolutionaries whom Sutherland has himself omitted, including Saint-Just, Couthon, Le Bas and Augustin Robespierre, and how these experiences in turn fed into their views of the situation in Paris.

Whilst there were certainly connections between politics in Paris and in the provinces, there was also a great deal of miscommunication and confusion. As to what Robespierre knew of the activities of the deputies on mission whom he had recalled, the obvious point here is that the victors of Thermidor, including the men Sutherland mentioned, had both incentive and opportunity to suppress evidence incriminating them. As an example I recounted in my book how Fréron and Barras not only asked for and received the extraordinary sum of 800,000 *livres* for their activities on mission, but subsequently claimed to have lost it in an accident whilst travelling (p. 230). How much of their activities did Robespierre know? Enough to refuse to speak with them (p. 242). Enough for both of them to join a conspiracy to destroy him. Despite the destruction of so much evidence by the Thermidoreans we can make fairly reliable guesses as to which Montagnards Robespierre considered culpable by observing which ones were panicked enough to take the risk of engaging in the plot that would bring him down before he could denounce them.

Sutherland declares that I say that Robespierre was “blameless” for the Terror. The old story of Robespierre as the man to blame is still accepted without question by most non-specialists. It is unusual, though, for an expert on the French Revolution to still be making this kind of claim. Sutherland's perspective comes across as somewhat old-fashioned. By loading the blame on to Robespierre, making him “take the rap for the Terror,” we avoid looking at more profound reasons, more troubling reasons, why terror developed. We can say it was all the fault of that unpleasant Robespierre—that Rousseauist, that paranoid man, that power-hungry dictator, that puritan obsessed with virtue—and forget that terror was in great part the consequence of a set of collective choices. So much of the image of Robespierre as the man behind “the Terror” is invention and myth, begun by men who wanted to divert attention from their own involvement in terror and elaborated, deepened, and reified over the years into layer upon layer of myth; even to the latest, ridiculous story of the “death mask” and its supposedly scientific revelations. Do I think that Robespierre did terrible things in support of his vision of the Republic? Of course. Above all his part in the Law of Prairial. But that was not how he began; and the trajectory that he and others took is my subject.

Sutherland's most surprising—and inadvertently revealing—criticism of my book comes when he compares me to Albert Mathiez in my willingness to write an exculpation of Robespierre. Albert Mathiez was a great historian, but a historian of his time. Mathiez took up the cudgels to defend Robespierre and to expose Danton as venal and complicit in the foreign plot. It is reputed that Mathiez so detested Danton's commemoration as the hero of the Revolution that when he traveled to teach at the Sorbonne he routinely avoided the Metro Odéon so as to be spared the sight of Danton's statue proclaiming “Toujours de l'audace!” in sight of the early morning commuters. But I am not interested in writing partisan histories. Why would I be? I too am a historian of my time, and my interests lie in quite different areas than refighting old battles. If there is any implied commentary in my book on new battles, as there must be since the concept of revolution is still so contested today, it might just be that politicians operate on many levels and cannot or will not

foresee the potential consequences of their words and deeds. Sutherland says I suggest that Danton and some other opponents of Robespierre were corrupt. Yes, I do. That is because the evidence suggests that many of them *were* financially corrupt. That does not mean I think they deserved their fate, or that they were guilty of conspiracy with the foreign powers.

Sutherland said that he “would like to see the evidence that some Jacobins were looking for a way out of the terror … particularly Robespierre.” He seems to have missed the passages in my book where I discussed how Robespierre defended over seventy deputies who protested against the arrest of the Girondins, preventing them from being sent before the Revolutionary Tribunal, a step which, during the height of the politicians’ terror, would have been tantamount to a death sentence. Sutherland also passes over in silence my discussion of Robespierre’s persistent efforts to defend Danton and Desmoulins; his qualified support for the Dantonists during the earlier stages of their campaign; and above all his brief support for the initiative for a *committee of clemency* (a move fiercely opposed by Billaud-Varenne). We know how the story ended, of course. Robespierre changed his position on the Dantonists after the revelation of the duplicity of Fabre, and thereafter he was to cling to the policy of terror for what remained of his life. But we need not tell Robespierre’s story backwards. The point is not to assume that he always was, at heart, an apologist of terror, but to understand how he got to that point. Our vision of Robespierre is skewed. We think of him as he ended up—defending terror. My interest was seeing how he got there, how he arrived at that moment when he chose terror, and no longer saw a possibility of any other way out. That moment came late in his life. For Robespierre a personal Rubicon was agreeing to the arrest of his friends, Desmoulins and Danton, putting virtue before friendship. He never recovered.

We should not be content to purvey the same old myths about revolutionary politics. “Does it matter?” says Sutherland, speaking of my point that the Girondins, not Robespierre, began a campaign of personal calumny by saying that Robespierre opposed the declaration of war because he was in the pay of the court. To which I reply—yes, it does matter. First, it matters simply because, as historians, we should try to be accurate. But it also matters because we need to have a clearer understanding of how the politicians’ terror developed and how politicians can choose a path that leads to terror, without understanding the possible consequences of their choices. So yes, it does matter that it was Brissot and his group that first upped the stakes of the politicians’ terror by attacking the integrity of Robespierre for opposing the war; who attacked the immunity of deputies by calling for the arrest of Sillery and d’Orléans; that it was the Girondin Birotteau who made the call to remove the immunity of deputies; and that it was the Girondins who later succeeded in sending Marat before the Revolutionary Tribunal, though all of these measures were to backfire on the Girondins themselves, and with deadly effect (pp. 163–4, 176). This is precisely my point; it is integral to my argument about the political trajectory taken by revolutionary leaders and the consequences of their choices. My point about Brissot is not that he made a conscious choice to bring about terror, any more than Robespierre did, but that as a politician wielding power Brissot’s choices had long-term consequences that he did not anticipate. Brissot was a political lightweight, a pamphleteer out of his depth, who made a lot of reckless decisions, of which the most fateful one was to use his considerable political clout as a Jacobin leader and leading speaker in the Legislative Assembly over the winter of 1791–92 to spearhead the drive to declare war, a war that not only contributed considerably to bringing about the revolutionary terror, but also lasted far longer than the terror did and claimed many more lives.

A central idea underlying my book’s title was that “choosing terror” came about as an indirect consequence of making other, seemingly quite different choices. That is the nature of politics, then as now. Hilary Clinton’s latest memoir, by an ironic coincidence entitled *Hard Choices* (2014), recalls her decision to vote in support of war in Iraq in 2002, a decision that has cast a shadow on her political career ever since. She claims she had acted as she thought right at the time. Many others thought the same way. With hindsight she admits, “But I still got it wrong. Plain and simple.” Politicians, thinking that they are choosing war that will end terror, can actually be putting into motion a chain of events that may escalate it.

Sutherland thinks that the friendship networks that were so central to Jacobin politics are potentially confusing and suggests that “charts” would make the connections clearer. I can

appreciate why he would prefer revolutionaries' friendships networks to be clear-cut and unambiguous—but they were neither. They were shifting, intertwined, sometimes self-interested, sometimes altruistic, sometimes fervent, sometimes tepid, and waxed and waned over time. As my book makes clear, a further complication was that friendship itself could constitute a suspect political category before the Revolutionary Tribunal. Friendship between politicians could be redolent of a behind closed doors conspiracy, giving people a powerful incentive to disavow their friends. Revolutionaries themselves often were not sure who was a friend of whom or whether their own friends were "real" friends or would betray them when the crunch came. There was breathtaking loyalty that might make even a cold-blooded historian weep, as when Barnave refused to denounce his friends, the Lameths, though he was in prison and the Lameths had emigrated; or when Ducos and Boyer-Fonfrède protested so strongly at the arrest of their friend Vergniaud and the other Girondins, that they too were eventually arrested and perished with the rest; or when Le Bas on 9 Thermidor tore himself free of friends who tried to restrain him to demand to share the arrest—and soon after the deaths—of Robespierre and Saint-Just. Charts can add nothing to our understanding of such instances of loyalty because friendships were not so much about whom a revolutionary leader knew as about how he *felt* about those bonds of friendship. Nor will they help us to understand the ramifications of the many betrayals of friendship that took place, whether out of diverging convictions or simply out of the understandable desire to save one's own skin. In order to make sense of the role of friendship in revolutionary politics we need, not statistics and charts, but a close attention to the human face of the protagonists, empathy with our subjects, and an understanding of the value of friendship, accessible through the new history of emotions. Thus this book takes seriously the force and importance of emotion in the Revolution.

Mazeau felt the conclusion to my book had a cynical undertone. Heuer was much closer to the mark when she picked up on the sense of sadness—the "what was it all for and what did they die for?" part. It is true that *Choosing Terror* has a mournful ending—but that was also the subject matter. How could it be otherwise? Most of the protagonists of my book died as a direct consequence of the politicians' terror. Though they began with such high hopes and many achieved admirable things, their end was brutal. It is an intensely sad tale. I had thought of adding a further chapter entitled "what they were fighting for," which would talk about the other side of the coin, what their virtue—their sacrifice of self—was for. It would be a chapter about liberty, equality, and the rights of all; about democracy; about the right to subsistence and an end to poverty; about the right to education; about communities where everyone works to secure the well-being of their fellows; and it would be about the end to corruption, greed, exploitation, and oppression by a self-interested elite. It would look to the future that the revolutionary leaders did not live to see and that, frankly, many of us are still waiting to see fully realized.

On a wider note, my book did not set out to say that virtue in politics was wrong and bound to fail. On the contrary, it is essential, but we have to think carefully about what we mean by it and what we can reasonably expect of politicians. By a coincidence, when I received these reviews I was at an international conference on "Vertu et politique: les pratiques des législateurs, 1789 – 2014" attended by 250 people. It was not just a history conference about a long-gone past of interest only to specialists like myself. On the contrary, backing for the conference came from a group of deputies who are members of the "Club des Amis de l'Incorrigeable," and the current President of the National Assembly, Claude Bartolone, thought the subject of sufficient contemporary relevance to host a reception for the conference speakers at his official residence, where he spoke to us about the need for virtue in political life. A recent poll found that 70 percent of the French think their deputies are corrupt. France is beset by a generation that has scant belief in the integrity (modern-speak for virtue) of its own politicians. Nor is France alone in facing this problem of cynicism about her political leaders. People do not use the term "virtue" now but they do speak of integrity and dedication to the public good—and of their opposites: of corruption, self-enrichment, cronyism, and disregard for the realities of the lives of the poor. Evidently the world of contemporary politics could do with a lot more virtue in it! In that sense there is much to be learned from the revolutionary generation. But there are lessons to be learned too in how not to manage politics. It is not viable to conduct politics in a situation where the political regime cannot first be stabilized, where the opinions of deputies are criminalized, and where they do not have immunity for voicing their opinions. Revolutionary transitions are fraught with risks, not least to the people who try to bring

them about; and their own lives, along with the lives of the people who are dearest to them, may bear the cost.

#### Notes

[1] For this interpretation of revolutionary terror, see in particular Jean-Clément Martin, *Violence et révolution: essais sur la naissance d'un mythe national* (Paris: Seuil, 2006); and Annie Jourdan, “Les discours de la terreur à l'époque révolutionnaire,” *French Historical Studies*, 36 (2012): 52-81.

[2] See Mette Harder, “Crisis of Representation: The National Convention and the Search for Political Legitimacy, 1792-1795” (Phd, University of York, July 2010). Michel Biard’s review gives the details of his forthcoming book on the Conventionnels.

[3] Since the publication of *Choosing Terror*, the appearance of a fascinating study based on the letters of Madame Jullien throws new light on the experience of Jacobin politics from the perspective of a woman who was close to some of the leaders, including Robespierre. See Lindsay A.H. Parker, *Writing the Revolution: A French Woman’s History in Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[4] See, for example, the work of Stephen Clay, “Vengeance, Justice and the Reactions in the Revolutionary Midi,” *French History* 23 (2009): 22-46.

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