

I • Use, the Useful, and Public Utility

A Theory of Musical Value

It is hard to imagine today why, in nineteenth-century France, usefulness came to mean something as all-encompassing and socially legitimizing as the public good, and how the arts were esteemed to the extent that they were useful. With the advent of modernism, the avant-garde from Maurice Ravel to Pierre Boulez responded to this pervasive concern with disdain. Their rhetoric, which many of us have come to share, makes the useful seem banal and pedestrian, conjuring up the notion of something suitable or merely adequate, efficient, perhaps, but only marginally better than useless and not meriting close attention. Why, then, is the concept still deeply meaningful in France?

Ravel and Satie's playful experiments with the useful, although critical, prod us to take this seriously. Can we disagree with the former's epigraph for his *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911), which refers to "the delicious and ever new pleasure of a useless occupation"?¹ After his brilliantly sensual *Jeux d'eau*, exotically lyrical *Shéhérazade*, classically restrained *Sonatine*, bizarre but virtuoso *Scarbo*, and ambitiously original *Daphnis et Chloé*, composing waltzes must have felt to Ravel like making a frothy Viennese dessert. If this was art for art's sake, the music would have "a superior utility in and of itself" serving the cult of beauty or truth.² Or was Ravel's music a retort to Vincent d'Indy, who linked the modern artist's usefulness to artistic progress that "assimilates the lofty manifestations of art from all times"?³ Ravel borrows an older genre to give it a modern twist. As charming melodies, sensually softened by suspensions on major and minor seconds, alternate

1. From the preface of Henri de Régnier's novel, *Les Rencontres de M. de Bréot* (1904). Michael Puri, in "Dandy, Interrupted: Sublimation, Repression, and Self-Portraiture in Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* (1909–1912)," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 60, 2 (Summer 2007), connects this attitude to Ravel's dandyism.

2. Adrien Mithouard, "Déclaration," *L'Occident* (February 1902): 120. "L'art est à lui seul une utilité supérieure. . . . La beauté est le seul déterminant véritable de l'œuvre."

3. Vincent d'Indy, "L'Artiste moderne," *L'Occident*, December 1901, 8; *Monde musical*, 15 January 1903, 3.

with sweetly languorous cadences that resolve traditionally, Ravel both caresses the listener's ear and gives the mind a sense of well-being. At the same time, chords using as many notes as the pianist has fingers, juxtaposed tonalities, and accents that jar, interrupting the lilting waltz, challenge any reduction to the "noble" or the "sentimental." But, given the association with ballroom dancing and light entertainment, waltzes were not an obvious context for extending the musical language. Marcel Marnat suggests that Ravel chose the epigraph for the work's publication in response to listeners who criticized him at its premiere for using "wrong notes that created a useless practical joke [*mystification*]."⁴ Was it the disorientation they objected to, or were the work's harsh dissonances perceived as not adding anything meaningful to the experience?⁵ Ravel suggests his motivation was just pleasure. Perhaps he also enjoyed bucking expectations. The work starts out fortissimo and moves in a gradual decrescendo. It was premiered at a concert of anonymous works organized by his friends for an audience of connoisseurs. After protests and boos, he got to watch the surprise of this public when few guessed it was by him.

Erik Satie, who some thought was the composer of Ravel's waltzes, went further in playfully questioning the utility of music. In his *Musique d'ameublement* (Furniture Music) (1920), he expresses a kind of glee in shocking through banality. Composed with Darius Milhaud for the intermissions of a Max Jacob play, the work incorporates well-known fragments from two popular works, Ambroise Thomas's opera *Mignon* (1866) and Camille Saint-Saëns's tone poem *Danse macabre* (1874).⁶ In the score, however, Satie notes that this music "replaces 'waltzes' and 'operatic fantasias.' Don't be confused! It's something else! . . . It's new, it doesn't upset customs; it isn't tiring; it's French; it won't wear out; it isn't boring."⁷ In a prospectus, Satie and Milhaud expressed their ironic intentions: "We want to establish a music designed to satisfy 'useful' needs. Art has no part in such needs. Furniture music creates a vibration; it has no other goal; it fills the same

4. Marcel Marnat, *Maurice Ravel* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), 298. The premiere took place at a concert of the Société musicale indépendante on 9 May 1911. Marnat's thesis may be true, but it was common practice at the time to use epigraphs when submitting works anonymously for competitions. Ravel's epigraph could have been used for the concert and thus chosen before the work's premiere.

5. Marcel Proust writes about "useless complexity" in Gabriel Fauré's music: "Do you know that young musicians [e.g., Claude Debussy and Pierre de Bréville] are almost unanimous in not liking Fauré's *La Bonne Chanson*? It seems that it's uselessly complicated, very inferior to the others." Letter to Pierre Lavallé, 30 September 1894, in Marcel Proust, *Correspondance*, ed. Philip Kolb (Paris: Plon, 1970), 1: 338.

6. See also Satie's *Sonatine bureaucratique* (1917), which parodies Clementi's sonatinas.

7. Reproduced in Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 319–20.

role as light and heat—as comfort in every form.” With this in mind, for the first performance they explained, “We urgently beg you not to attach any importance to it and to act during the intermission as if the music did not exist. . . . It hopes to contribute to life the way a casual conversation does, or a picture in the gallery.”⁸ Such comments situate Satie’s music beyond art as it was conceived at the time, beyond concert performances in hushed halls full of listeners attending to it seriously. Who could have known at the time that the functionless repetition of the same few chords in *Vexations* (1893) or the melodic fragments in *Musique d’ameublement* might both foreshadow elevator music and inspire John Cage, Fluxus, early minimalists, and Brian Eno, in concept if not sound?⁹ Ironically, something conceived as artistically useless can turn artistically useful.

To understand what “useful” meant to the French and often still means today, however, we must go further. What is the use of composing music? Can something playful and pleasurable be socially useful? What needs can music satisfy? Forty years later, and from a radically different perspective, Boulez made some similar assumptions. In 1952, he claimed, “any musician who has not felt the necessity of the serial language is USELESS. All his work situates itself short of the necessities of his times.”¹⁰ If “useless” here means not responding to the dictates of progress, what is useful, Boulez implies, is the extent to which composers and their music address “the necessities” of their times. Boulez’s mentor, Pierre Souvtchinsky, calls this “historical utility.” For him, the “great creator” is one who is useful to history, shedding light on “everything around him . . . the close and the distant, what lies ahead and what came before him.”¹¹ Of course, since histories are relative, dependent on the needs and desires of those writing them, so are claims of utility. “Useful” implies a value judgment. Boulez dismisses one kind of taste to promote another. His objection to nonserial composers is not that they failed to achieve

8. Satie and Milhaud quoted in Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant Garde in France, 1885 to World War I: Alfred Jarry, Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie, Guillaume Apollinaire* (rev. ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 168–69. Biographers have pointed out the possible influence of Matisse who “dreamed of an art without any distracting subject matter which might be compared to a good armchair” (Orledge, *Satie*, 222).

9. The 34 chords in *Vexations* are to be repeated 840 times (see ex. 23 below). John Cage, whose music was influenced by Satie, organized its American premiere in New York on 9 September 1963 and performed it, alternating with David Tudor, Christian Wolff, and others. See Orledge, *Satie*, 143–44, 277–78, as well as chaps. 11 and 12.

10. Pierre Boulez, *Relèves d’apprenti* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 149. Boulez stresses the word *INUTILE* by capitalizing it.

11. Pierre Souvtchinsky, “Ceux du ‘Domaine musical’” (1963), in *(Re)Lire Souvtchinski*, ed. Eric Humbertclaude (La Bresse: Eric Humbertclaude, 1990), 253. Thanks to an introduction by François Lesure, I got to know Souvtchinsky in Paris in the late 1970s–early 1980s and am grateful for our many conversations on Stravinsky and French music culture.

their desired results, but rather that their music was futile from his perspective: it did not contribute to *his* hopes and desires. Now, fifty years later, what Boulez found useful, many are finding no longer relevant to today's "necessities."

In France, this is not just semantics and opinions, whether humorously provocative or deadly serious. Nor does it always carry pejorative connotations as in English, where utility usually refers to the practical benefits of something useful, or is synonymous with "utilitarian" (cf. utilitarianism, the ethical doctrine promoted by Jeremy Bentham in the early nineteenth century). With virtue based on utility, "utilitarian" refers to that which is "conducive to the happiness and good of the greatest number."¹² In France, as Ravel, Satie, and Boulez intimate, there is far more to it.

The concept of utility, as the French use it, has a long tradition, stretching back to Plato. Recognizing the importance of music in the *Republic*, Plato insisted on it as part of the education of young citizens. Because music was powerful enough to be dangerous, however, he would admit only musical modes that would harmonize the soul.¹³ Many cultures in Europe and elsewhere have since then appreciated the social utility of music. Kings, dukes, and bishops have long commissioned artwork for their own greater glory, and its prestige has sometimes been linked with theirs. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Germans and Americans also used the rhetoric of utility to promote the public culture of music.

The concept took on particular significance in France. Art and beauty emerged as useful when, after centuries of monarchy and a society based on inequalities, Enlightenment philosophers began to consider what it would take for human beings to live together as equals. From this came the radically new idea that people had needs as a people and that a government should focus on them. Anything that

12. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed., ed. Stuart Flexner (New York: Random House, 1987), s.v. In England, utilitarianism flourished from 1820 to 1850. For the origins of these ideas and their relation to French concepts, see Elie Halévy, *La Formation du radicalisme philosophique*, 3 vols. (1901–4; rpt., Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995).

13. In his *Republic*, Plato proposes that education should begin with music, then gymnastics (376e). Rejecting certain modes as "useless" because they are too "soft and convivial" to train men of war, he prefers the Dorian and Phrygian "because they imitate the tones of men in adversity and in prosperity, in a moderate and in a courageous mood" (399a–c). He attaches "supreme importance to a musical education because rhythm and harmony sink most deeply into the recesses of the soul and take most powerful hold of it, bringing gracefulness in their train" and because "he that has been duly nurtured therein will have the keenest eye for defects . . . he will rightly blame and hate all shameful objects . . . and when reason comes he will welcome her most cordially" (401d–e, 403a). Music imparts "not knowledge, but a kind of harmoniousness" (522a). See also the *Timaeus* on music's effect on the harmony of the soul and the *Laws* for connections between music and legislation.

served those needs was considered useful. As people evaluated the hierarchy of their needs, utility became a way of navigating the tensions between individual and collective interests in France. Since the late eighteenth century, no other society or national government has embraced and applied the principles of public utility to such a degree, or made it a central, organizing concept through which both to construct the very notions of the state and the nation and to locate music within them.

TENSIONS BETWEEN THE USEFUL AND THE BEAUTIFUL

In debates over the nature and relative merits of the useful, French philosophers and artists have often disagreed about whether the useful is necessarily pleasing, or the pleasing necessarily useful, and how both of these relate to the true, the good, and the beautiful. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, French philosophers linked the useful and the beautiful. Some believed that, in art as in nature, true beauty, defined by symmetry, proportion, and arrangement of parts of a whole, inevitably has utility.¹⁴ As we have seen with the city of Paris, the useful can indeed be beautiful and the beautiful useful. Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1755–1849), an architect and sculptor as well as magistrate, and the Paris deputy most concerned with making the city attractive during and after the Revolution, was passionate about “composing” Paris, as one might a work of art.¹⁵ He thought it should serve as an example. Not only should the city function well, Quatremère wanted its beauty to be part of its utility. That is, conceiving architecture as a form of language, he saw its buildings and urban design as serving needs of the imagination.¹⁶ Unlike Chateaubriand, who enjoyed losing himself in the tiny alleys of the Cité, or Victor Hugo, who preferred his Notre Dame surrounded by streets and boutiques, Quatremère, inspired by what he saw in Italy, preferred space around major buildings in order to show off the harmony of their parts.

14. Charles Rollin, excerpt from *Traité des études* (1726–28), in A. Chaillot, *Leçons élémentaires de littérature, de style, et de composition spécialement écrites pour les pensionnats de demoiselles* (Paris: Sarlit, 1867), 23. See also Shaftsbury as discussed in Annie Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne, 1680–1814* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984), 169–70.

15. Imprisoned under the Terror, a member of the Five Hundred in 1795, and close friend of the republican painter David, Quatremère de Quincy was elected deputy from Paris in 1791 and again in 1820–22. Beginning with the Restoration, he became perpetual secretary of the Académie des beaux-arts (1816–39) where he exerted a conservative influence on the arts, resisting both romanticism and the commercial spirit.

16. Sylvia Lavin develops this thesis in her *Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

“Accessories” too were important to him. The beauty of the Tuileries Palace, he pointed out, was set off by the avenues and gardens surrounding it. City “accessories” with symbolic power, such as statues of the king, had to be replaced; new ones, such as fountains, were added for embellishment.¹⁷ Quatremère, like others at the time, thus understood that some arts, such as architecture, could embrace both *utilité*, construed as serving needs, and *agrément*, pleasing with their charm.¹⁸ Indeed, it was how the architecture of Paris synthesized beauty and utility that made it a compelling model.¹⁹

Many French philosophers, artists, and teachers throughout the nineteenth century looked to Horace’s *Ars poetica* for arguments as to why the other arts—music, painting, sculpture, and dance—should, like poetry, embody both the useful and the pleasurable.²⁰ From Boileau and translations by Voltaire to the many nineteenth-century prose versions of his works compiled for schoolchildren, including one by the revolutionary poet Marie-Joseph Chénier (André Chénier’s younger brother), Horace had a significant influence on French thinking about art. French theorists appreciated how, in reiterating the Aristotelian ideal of art as the imitation of nature and the notion of music as the imitation of feeling, he elevates nature as the unique principle and model of art. From such ideas, they concluded that if art imitates, it is necessarily useful as a sign.²¹ Still more important was another kind of utility to which Horace pointed. Construing art as the most perfect

17. René Schneider, *Quatremère de Quincy et son intervention dans les arts (1788–1850)* (Paris: Hachette, 1910), 20–28, 63–65.

18. In his *Les Beaux Arts réduits à un même principe*, ed. Jean-Rémy Mantion (1746; rpt., Paris: Amateurs de livres, 1989), Charles Batteux argues for three kinds of art: those that use nature as it is and whose object is serving man’s needs (the mechanical arts); those that arise from feelings that produce abundance and tranquility, that imitate nature, and whose object is pleasure (the fine arts); and those generated by need, that taste perfects, and whose object is both utility and pleasure (architecture and rhetoric) (82).

19. Quatremère de Quincy was interested in architecture that was not merely useful and incidentally beautiful (and thereby excluded by Kant from the fine arts on the grounds of its utility), but rather architecture that was fundamentally useful *and* beautiful and, as such, the model for a conceptual synthesis of utility and beauty. I’m grateful to Evan Bonds for this clarification.

20. In his *Poèmes diverses: Edition à l’usage des classes* (Paris: Maradan, 1818), Marie-Joseph Chénier translates lines 343–44 in Horace as “L’art tout entier, c’est d’instruire et de plaire / A l’agrément que joint l’utilité.” J.-P.-A. Lalanne, in his *Art poétique d’Horace* (Paris: Gedalge Jeune, 1887), offers this prose translation: “Ou instruire ou plaire, voilà le but des poètes; ou bien ils veulent tout à la fois peindre ce qui est agréable et utile dans la vie” (44). I am grateful to Annegret Fauser for encouraging me to examine Horace’s importance in nineteenth-century France.

21. In his *Beaux Arts*, Batteux argues that music and dance too must have meaning as signs in part because they are constantly compared with nature. Without this capacity, the arts can only be compared to prisms, things that amuse the sensations but bore the mind.

form of thought, he stresses the capacity of the arts to instruct. With this, the arts can address a moral need. Eliciting a moral *jouissance*, a delight of the mind, they can have moral utility.²²

This notion of moral utility as the highest purpose of literature and the arts resonated widely from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries in part because of the perceived connection between morals and virtues.²³ Descartes saw this moral potential as rooted in the belief that there can be a mechanical connection between the arts, particularly music, and one's body and soul. Not only does one experience sensual pleasure from music, one can learn from it and use the practice of music to demonstrate inner virtues to the world. As such, music and the other arts can instill moral values and suggest models for behavior, providing benefits to the individual as well as the community.²⁴ Eighteenth-century theorists who focused on the moral utility of the arts considered usefulness an alternative artistic goal to pleasure or fantasy. They looked to the useful to extricate from the pleasurable a more elevated sense of beauty, and thus a significant role for the arts.²⁵ These perspectives influenced thinking about the arts in France for centuries to come.

Many French thinkers also focused on the importance Horace assigned to charm,

22. In his *Considérations morales*, Quatremère de Quincy defines the moral as the opposite of the material and the sensual. Arts have a moral utility, he writes, only if they result in enlarging the mind, evoking noble feelings (18).

23. See J.-F. Marmontel, "Essai sur les romans," in id., *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Verdière, 1818–20), 10: 287, and Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne*, 595.

24. Michel Noiray suggests that arguments inferring a moral purpose for music may also have arisen in response to the debates about religion. Music at the time was associated with sensuous temptations and seen as distinct from the sacred, though people went to church services in part for the pleasure music afforded them there (private conversation, Paris, September 1997).

25. These ideas come up particularly in essays on the social function of theater and fiction. Some assumed that if an artwork supported or promoted a social ideal, if it addressed the society's perceived needs and desires, it could not have abstract, universal value, i.e., beauty, and vice versa. Rousseau comments on this in his *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758), "It is necessarily the pleasure they afford, and not their utility. . . . To please people, one needs spectacles that reinforce their tendencies instead of those that would moderate them. . . . The general effect of the spectacle is to reinforce national character, to augment natural inclinations, and to give new energy to all the passions. . . . [in sum] to exaggerate and not to change established morals." Of course, Rousseau's notion of using art to "reinforce national character" implies just as explicit a social utility as the moralizing kind he is arguing against. In his response, d'Alembert agreed with Rousseau's statement that "an author who wants to go against general taste will soon write for himself alone. . . . The principal goal of playwrights is to please." But, he counters, "being useful is at least their second goal. What does it matter then if it is their first or second purpose if they are, in effect, useful?" (app. 3 in the 1889 rpt., 300–33). See also Watelet, "Art," in *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture, et gravure* (Paris: Prault, 1792), 106, and Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française*, 595, 599.

a concept dear not only to Ancien Régime aristocrats but also to nineteenth-century republicans. Pleasing and seducing, he argued, encourages attachment: in nature as in art, things touch us in proportion to the relationship we have with them.²⁶ When we are attached to something, we listen more easily to its lessons. In this sense, utility is a relationship we develop with something encouraged by the pleasure it brings. French thinkers built on Horace, proposing that the principal purpose of writing was to convince and touch and that “pleasure helps persuasion.” The addition of *agréments*, or what Charles Rollin calls ornaments, simultaneously satisfied the mind and the imagination, turning the pleasurable into an auxiliary of the useful.²⁷

In the late nineteenth century, republicans who focused on civic instruction in the schools took care to portray Horace as a sympathetic character. Although he had worked to glorify the Roman emperor, they pointed to his studies in Athens and early embrace of republican values.²⁸ This allowed them to use Horace’s texts as models of clarity and accessibility, texts that showed how thinking well leads to writing well, lessons forming the moral fiber of the young and promoting leisure as more than amusement.²⁹ Horace continued to be translated, taught, analyzed, and read by old magistrates and schoolchildren alike. In 1895, he was considered by some to be the “liveliest writer from antiquity.”³⁰

The discourse about beauty’s utility, particularly through education, had great currency up through 1900. Music remained a central part of this. In an 1880 report arguing for obligatory music education in the country’s primary schools, Saint-Saëns points out, “The development of a music culture is a sure index of a superior civilization.”³¹ The educator and scholar Julien Tiersot echoed this when

26. Horace, *Ars poetica*; Batteux, *Beaux Arts*, 167–69.

27. Rollin, *Traité des études*, 21–22. See also Becq, *Genèse de l’esthétique française*, 65.

28. In his “Etude” in *Œuvres complètes d’Horace*, ed. Félix Lemaistre (1866; Paris: Garnier frères, 1885), Hippolyte Rigault points out that if Horace was a conservative, he never promoted monarchy or rejected the republican friends of his youth. The anonymous author of *Virgile et Horace, leur vie et leurs ouvrages: Notes d’un professeur* (Paris: Crouille-Morant, 1892) notes how much his poor father sacrificed for Horace (an example of paternal love) and what a good friend Horace was to his patron.

29. As François Guoin points out in *Essai sur une réforme des méthodes d’enseignement: Nouveau procédé pour étudier les classiques: Horace, L’Art poétique* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1880), republicans continued to teach the classics in Latin and Greek as a way to enrich students’ moral and intellectual capacities. Other Horace studies written for use in schools include Chénier, *Poèmes diverses*; Lalanne, *Art poétique d’Horace; Virgile et Horace, leur vie et leurs ouvrages. Notes d’un professeur* (Paris: Crouille-Morant, 1892). See also Antoine Campaux, *De la critique du texte d’Horace au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1889).

30. Rigault, “Etude,” xlviii.

31. “Rapport de M. Saint-Saëns” in Ministre de l’Instruction publique, *Rapports sur l’enseignement du chant dans les écoles primaires* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1881), 5.

he called choral singing an “incomparable agent of moral civilization and national education.” If classes could only start the day with singing, when students were attentive and receptive, he noted, music could “turn school’s *moral influence* into a living reality.”³² However, not everyone associated beauty with utility. Both abroad and within France, there were counterdiscourses, some rooted in political conservatism and Ancien Régime values.

In Germany, where aesthetics, the study of the beautiful, emerged as a discipline in the late eighteenth century, philosophers disentangled the two concepts. While Frenchmen such as Rollin believed that “what has the most utility usually has dignity and grace” and therefore “true beauty is never separate from its utility,”³³ in 1755, the Swiss J. G. Sulzer, focusing on form, proposed that the beautiful is distinct from both the useful and the perfect. Immanuel Kant agreed that what is pleasurable satisfies some need, but believed that the useful pleases only as a means. Beauty is simply what pleases.³⁴ Taste in France had been tied to logic and, with judgment, was part of rational reflection.³⁵ But for Kant, it was subjective. He thought that beauty was grasped immediately and spontaneously. Mysterious and ineffable, it is a kind of ideal, autonomous of external concerns and having no need for a connection to use or pleasure. When released from the necessity of imitating nature, beauty leaves aside its potential for utility as a sign. As such, Kant saw its perception as disinterested.

Out of such propositions emerged the romantics’ fascination with the sublime—the incomparably great—and art for art’s sake. French romantics followed the Germans in exploring subjective feeling, and the English in their taste for the picturesque. They also looked to Rousseau, who accorded much importance to passion and the logic of various feelings. However, in his preface to his play *Cromwell*

32. Jullien Tiersot, *Programme d’un recueil de chant à l’usage des écoles primaires de France* (Paris: Hachette, 1893), v–vi.

33. Rollin, *Traité des études*, 23.

34. “Kant’s attack on utility as a criterion of the beautiful comes from his need to locate purposiveness internally to an entity (e.g., art) rather than externally (which is what he thinks utility to be),” Tracy Strong notes (personal communication). See Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

35. Henri Tronchon points out in his “Une Science à ses débuts en France: L’Esthétique,” *Revue du mois*, 10 July 1912, that the French Académie pretty much ignored the new discipline of aesthetics until 1838, even though d’Alembert had cited Sulzer in the *Encyclopédie* in 1776 and Victor Cousin lectured at the Sorbonne on the beautiful as early as 1818 (37–64). In his “Music, Beauty, and the Paradox of Rationalism,” in *French Musical Thought, 1600–1800*, ed. Georgia Cowart (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1989), Charles Dill posits that Jean-Pierre de Crousaz’s *Traité du beau* (1715), an early French treatise on aesthetics, uses music to test the limits of rationalism (201, 206). In her *Genèse de l’esthétique française*, Becq agrees that Crousaz saw aesthetics as a way to transform the idea of reason (305).

(1827), Victor Hugo argues against the notion of absolute beauty and instead encourages poets to look for “the characteristic,” that which roots a drama in its own time. For him, literature is an expression of society, the evolution of art and artistic genre linked to the evolution of humanity. French romantic poets tended to be preoccupied with the social and political responsibilities of the artist. They saw themselves as prophets and continued to see art as useful in influencing morality. Hugo represented the best of this tradition throughout the nineteenth century. In his “The Function of the Poet” (1839), he writes, “People! écoutez le poète! . . . Lui seul a le front éclairé.” The poet should be a visionary as well as guardian of the past, one who understood the mysteries of the world and could unveil its truths: From the poet’s thought “a better society” would come.³⁶ These ideas resonated with Third Republic statesmen and Hugo became one of their heroes.

Other French, however, followed the Germans in rejecting the association of beauty with utility. Whereas classicists like Quatremère de Quincy had to find artworks useful to find them beautiful,³⁷ the French philosopher Victor Cousin came to different conclusions in part after studying Kant, Schelling, and Hegel and spending time in Germany. Although still focused on morals, in 1818, he explained, “The form of the beautiful is distinct from the form of the good; if art produces a moral perfection, it does not seek this or see it as its purpose. . . . Art serves neither religion and morals nor the pleasant and the useful.”³⁸ Cousin’s *Lectures on the True, the Beautiful and the Good* (1815–54) reflect the tension in France that crystallized around the notion of usefulness in both aesthetics and politics. Cousin sees the useful more narrowly as “the agreeable generalized,” although, like his predecessors, he links it with virtue, “that wisdom which discerns what is truly useful and surely leads to happiness.” But when judging the beautiful, like Kant, he emphasizes beauty’s disinterested nature. Whereas Quatremère and Batteux understood the purpose of the arts as addressing people’s needs,³⁹ Cousin thought

36. Victor Hugo, “Préface,” in id., *Cromwell* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), 91, and “Introduction” by Annie Ubersfeld, 44–45; Victor Hugo, *Les Rayons et les ombres* (Paris: Hetzel, 1840), 13, 18–19. See also Alfred de Vigny’s poem “La Bouteille à la mer.” I’m grateful to Jean-Louis Morhange for these references.

37. Quatremère de Quincy, *Considérations morales*, 45.

38. Victor Cousin, *Cours de philosophie professé à la Faculté des Lettres pendant l’année 1818 . . . d’après les meilleures rédactions de ce cours par M. Adolphe Garnier* (Paris: Hachette, 1836).

39. When it came to art, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Quatremère and others argued that if the arts had reached perfection in ancient Greece, it was because they addressed people’s principal needs. See A.-C. Quatremère de Quincy, *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l’art ou de l’Influence de leur emploi sur le génie et le goût de ceux qui les produisent ou qui les jugent, et sur le sentiment de ceux qui en jouissent et en reçoivent les impressions* (1815; rpt., Paris: Fayard, 1989), 9–10, and Batteux, *Beaux Arts*, 81.

fine arts should “produce the disinterested emotion of beauty without regard to the utility either of the spectator or the artist.” For Cousin, “need” was a pejorative. It gives rise to desire, and this “presupposes in him who experiences it a want, a defect, and, to a certain extent, suffering.” Unlike Quatremère and the revolutionaries, who attached great importance to developing love and passion in a people, Cousin considers passion, the culmination of desire, as something passive limiting our free will. Beauty is important because it is “free from all desire.” It does not have to address needs or otherwise be useful. It can be “its own satisfaction.” In this sense, Cousin considered art autonomous.

Yet, Cousin notes that the sentiment of the beautiful can serve a function: it “purifies and elevates the soul by the affinity between the beautiful and the good, and by the relation of ideal beauty to its principle, which is God.” In this sense, art is, ideally, “the expression of moral beauty by the aid of physical beauty.” Although he differs with Kant on the nature of the sublime, giving it more substance, Cousin, like Kant and others, sees ideal beauty as similar to the sublime in that it “awakens in us the sentiment of the infinite.” Artworks too “may have the charm of the infinite.” Because of this, Cousin sees art as fulfilling a religious purpose: nurturing hope for the immortality of our souls.⁴⁰

Music held a special place for Cousin. Seeing its domain as sentiment and its mode as expression, he shared much with musicians of his generation, especially Meyerbeer.⁴¹ But unlike Hector Berlioz, Cousin objected to programmatic music and music stimulating mental images. Seeing “its peculiar charm” as elevating “the soul toward the infinite” more than any other art, he believed music could bring us closest to ideal beauty.⁴² In some ways, his work intersects with Eduard Hanslick’s *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (The Beautiful in Music) (1854), which argues that only in the “pure contemplation” of its form and through our imagination can we truly appreciate the beauty of music. For Cousin, however, all beauty shares a “spiritual beauty” more sacred and religious than Hanslick’s *Geist*.

Cousin’s concern with the spiritual derived not only from his fascination with German philosophy and his religious orientation, but also from his politics. As someone who took sides with the royalists in 1814–15, Cousin may have reduced

40. The citations in these paragraphs come from Victor Cousin, *Lectures on the True, the Beautiful and the Good*, trans. O. W. Wight (New York: Appleton, 1854), 131, 142–46, 154, 157, 162–74, 230, 234–36, 338.

41. Meyerbeer embraced Cousin’s eclecticism in his music. In her *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Katharine Ellis discusses the influence of Cousin on François-Joseph Fétis’s understanding of musical beauty of the past, his teleological approach to music history, and his distaste for program music (36–43).

42. *Ibid.*, 170–73.

needs to desires and desires to passions because he associated such concerns with bourgeois industrialists, intent on social mobility and the acquisition of wealth.⁴³ He may also have been responding to Alexis de Tocqueville, who, in *Democracy in America* (1835), had proposed that democratic nations with an absence of superfluous wealth “will cultivate the arts that serve to render life convenient in preference to those whose object is to embellish it.” In other words, the “universal desire for well-being and the constant efforts in which each engages to procure it for himself, make the taste for the useful predominate over the love of the beautiful” and make people “want the beautiful to be useful.”⁴⁴ In the preface to his *Lectures*, addressed to the “serious youth of the Restoration” as “the seed and the hope of the future,” Cousin’s politics are front and center. He hoped that his philosophy would conduct “human societies to the true republic, that dream of all generous souls in which our times can be realized in Europe only by constitutional monarchy.” Democracy, he believed, would “always traverse liberty, bring all right into disorder, and through disorder into dictatorship.”⁴⁵ Such comments suggest that there were political implications associated with the ideals he was promoting, including the autonomy of art, as if it belonged with the leisured practices of the aristocracy. Cousin’s idealism may have served as a needed balance to the era’s materialist positivism, promoted by Auguste Comte. His moral principles influenced major leaders of the Third Republic. However, republicans differed with Cousin over the nature of duty and sacrifice, crucial to the nation’s needs from its people.⁴⁶

After the failures of the 1848 revolution, French poets like Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire embraced art for art’s sake more decisively than Cousin. Their intense distaste for the bourgeoisie’s rising power led some to withdraw from society rather than try to change it; they sought refuge in the transcendence of beauty in

43. Cousin may have been influenced by nineteenth-century French political economists who defined utility as the “property of an object or a human action to satisfy our needs, not the object or action itself” and believed that, because the utility of something can render it desirable, utility can also represent the “ability to satisfy economic desires.” See Paul-Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, vol. 6 (Paris: Hachette, 1873), and Léon Say and Joseph Chailley, *Nouveau dictionnaire d’économie politique* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1892), 2: 1140.

44. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. and trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (1835; rpt., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 439.

45. Cousin, *Lectures*, 10–11.

46. In his book *Victor Cousin* (Paris: Hachette, 1887), the republican minister Jules Simon stresses Cousin’s working-class background and plays down his royalist sympathies calling him a “simple spectateur de la lutte,” like the duc de Broglie, who had friends on both sides and accepted the Revolution when it became a *fait accompli* (26–28). In explaining his politics, Simon points to Cousin’s preference for unity within variety—not variety without unity (anarchy) or unity without variety (despotism) (44). On Simon’s differences with Cousin on the subject of duty, see p. 47.

art. Gautier prepared for this in the preface to *Albertus* (1836), claiming, “When something becomes useful, it ceases being beautiful. . . . It is no longer freedom, luxury, the blossoming of the soul in idleness.” Although he admitted that art can reflect artists’ feelings and their lives, twenty years later, he echoed Cousin in holding that art should not be a means, but an end.⁴⁷ Rejecting the preeminence of nature and considering all virtue artificial, Baudelaire, too, considered utility to be “the idea the most hostile to beauty” and *enseignement*, particularly the use of poetry to teach morals, a heresy. Poetry, he argued, should have no other goal than itself. “Is art useful? Yes. Why?” he asks. Not as propaganda, but because “it is art.”⁴⁸ Poetry can elevate people above their vulgar interests, but if a poet pursues a moral goal, it will diminish his poetic strength. Beauty for Baudelaire is mysterious and bizarre. This explains its individual nature. He foreshadows Ravel and Henri de Régnier in proposing that no poem will be so great, so noble, as that written uniquely for the pleasure of writing it. Like Cousin, Baudelaire sees the principle of poetry as “human aspiration toward a superior beauty.” But spirituality for him was an end in itself, not a form of religion. Later, the symbolists, who also rejected bourgeois preoccupations, likewise found the need for art to serve some moral or religious purpose too constraining. They also wished to make art with no function other than its own beauty. Republicans for the most part did not agree with these conclusions.

SATISFYING SOCIAL NEEDS AND CREATING THE NATION

If certain major philosophers and poets disdained the notion of utility so strongly, what kept it a viable concept, especially in the arts? Utility has remained compelling for the French even today, essentially because over time it developed from simply the concept of that which serves something into a theory of value.⁴⁹ This was inherent in the first use of the word in French (*utele*) in the *Psautier d’Oxford* of 1120 where it referred to that which satisfies not just any need, but a legitimate

47. Théophile Gautier, Preface to *Albertus* (1832), in id., *Emaux et camées* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), and “Du beau dans l’art,” in *L’Art moderne* (1856).

48. Charles Baudelaire, “Les Drames et les romans honnêtes (1851)” and “Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe (1859),” in id., *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Marcel Ruff (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 297–99 and 346–53. In “Les Drames,” Baudelaire also makes fun of virtue as “the condition sine qua non of success” and rejects academic prizes as encouraging hypocrisy.

49. In their *Nouveau dictionnaire d’économie politique*, Say and Chailley define value as *utilité produite* (2: 1143). Earlier, Condillac had defined the value of something as determined by its utility, and what satisfies a need as that which has value. In the early nineteenth century, Jean-Baptiste Say and Destutt de Tracy debated whether utility or labor constituted the measure of value. See Cheryl Welch, *Liberty and Utility: The French Idéologues and the Transformation of*

need, particularly a social one. Whereas during the classical era *utile* also meant the practical advantage that something provided, *utilité* in France maintained this sense of the word as satisfying social needs.⁵⁰ Underlying usefulness for the French is not only an explanation of economic exchange, but also a social relationship, an ethical position, and a political belief that, through addressing shared needs, one can build shared interests. As such, it helps those who espouse democracy to address society's needs and respond to them in a dynamic fashion.

The concept of utility grew in importance in the eighteenth century as a way to conceive of society as more than the domain of privileged elites using luxury to signal their status and distinction. Luxury was generally synonymous with frivolity, that is, excessive or superfluous consumption, consumption that was not strictly necessary. However, the debates about it beginning in the eighteenth century were rarely neutral and concerned far more than taste or fashion. Diderot distinguished between good and bad luxury, the former having social utility when it produced wealth and prosperity for all. Rousseau blamed luxury for corrupting morals and lashed out at the decadence of court life. He associated it not only with privileged elites, but also with women, effeminacy, and the decline of "true courage" and "military virtues." Drawing on broader issues, such as the nature and sources of social inequality, the attack on luxury crystallized criticism of the Ancien Régime. During the Revolution, some considered combating luxury as "the most important and patriotic of subjects." In the nineteenth century, republican political economists continued to lambaste luxury as a symptom of social inequality and a form of ostentatious, unproductive consumption that discouraged hard work. They preferred to define wealth by capital accumulation and investment rather than expenditure on luxury.⁵¹ The notable exception to this was state

Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 76–77. Michel Foucault also discusses utility as a theory of value in his *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 209–14, where he argues that the value of things is tied to their exchange. Although these discussions refer to economic value, the term *utilité*, as used in the Third Republic, is not restricted to this domain.

50. In France, *utilité* also has other connotations. In legal and administrative contexts it has been synonymous with "effective" (such as in producing a legal result) or sufficient (such as *en temps utile*, a sufficient or determinate amount of time needed to execute contracts). In his *Vocabulaire juridique*, Cornu notes that the useful "presents an interest different than the *voluptaire* [expenses for luxury, pleasure, or fantasy] and larger than the necessary" (831–32). In the theater, it refers to secondary roles or characters.

51. See Rousseau's early *Discours*, Diderot's *Observations sur le Nakaç*, Antoine-Prospér Lottin's *Discours contre le luxe* (1783), and Jean-Baptiste Say's *Traité d'économie politique* (1803), *Discours préliminaire*. Pointing out that the debates about luxury did not end in 1789, but continued throughout the nineteenth century, Jeremy Jennings discusses these in his "The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, 1 (January 2007): 79–105.

spending on opera, which every French government since the eighteenth century has continued to support despite its enormous cost. Opera was among those “collective luxuries”⁵² that could prove useful to the state in a variety of ways.

As they offered a way to both theorize and moralize in an alternative social mode diametrically opposed to self-indulgent luxury, questions of utility also created a counterdiscourse that, in interrogating the purposes of society, went hand in hand with the emergence of a new political system. This is already evident in Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* (1637), which expands the above definitions to mean a kind of relationship between people: “One is worth nothing if one is not useful to someone.”⁵³ In today’s terms, this means having a capacity or pursuing an activity that is beneficial to others. As such, utility becomes a kind of judgment. Voltaire and Diderot, in debates about the social function of various aspects of life, employ the concept to reflect a point of view and an ethical standard distinct from those of the king.⁵⁴ To the extent that the Enlightenment “made every man feel he can be better,” as Beaumarchais pointed out in 1784, utility became associated with an individual’s contributions to social progress: “I see in each class a wish to be useful, to succeed, to enlarge its ideas, its learning, its pleasures, which can only work to universal advantage, for this is how all will grow, prosper, and improve themselves.”⁵⁵

French monarchists, revolutionaries, and their republican successors all embraced the idea of serving others. It underlies French notions of duty—duty to God, religion, and country. It characterizes aristocratic loyalties, Catholic preoccupations, and republican civic responsibilities. As such, one could invoke utility to make appeals that go beyond political differences, particularly when related to the national interest. But whereas monarchists thought of the king’s subjects as useful in the economic sense, revolutionaries saw usefulness in the form of duty as an ethical requisite of citizenship. Duty was what Frenchmen were supposed

52. In his *Manuel républicain de l’homme et du citoyen* (1848; Paris: Colin, 1904), Charles Renouvier considered libraries, theaters, and museums as expressions of fraternity and civic education. Renouvier also believed that “nothing is beautiful, nothing is noble that is not also useful” (278). See Jennings, “Debate about Luxury.”

53. “C’est proprement ne valoir rien que de n’être utile à personne.” Cited in Guilbert and Lagane, *Grand Larousse*.

54. Littré’s *Dictionnaire*, s.v. *utile*, cites inter alia Voltaire’s remark about “douze mille sujets du roi très utiles, enchaînés par vingt chanoines très inutiles” (twelve thousand very useful subjects of the king, enslaved by twenty utterly useless canons). Under *utilité*, Littré cites Diderot’s assertion that “general utility [*utilité générale*] and common consent must be the two great rules of our actions.”

55. Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, introduction to his libretto for Salieri’s *Tarare*, cited in James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 52.

to share, a “common interest” that could form a basis for “the general will.”⁵⁶ In this sense, an association of the common with the useful does not come from the banal, the practical, or the universal. Utility here connotes finding self-interest in the collective interest.

THE CONCEPT OF *UTILITÉ PUBLIQUE*

The idea of *utilité publique* (public utility) helps clarify what people value as a nation and the relative importance they attach to a wide range of activities and institutions.⁵⁷ It derives its power from the fact that, for the most part, many French since the Revolution have historically accepted the role of the state in

56. Robert Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps* (1950; rpt., Paris: Vrin, 1995), 354. Tracy Strong explains that in Rousseau’s concept of the “general will,” the “common” is “what designates what [humans] experience when they experience the natural in each other” or

what occurs when no tension is experienced in movement between the first person singular and the plural for the same activity. . . . The general will has the common as its object and springs from a will that is common. . . . The common self, and by extension the general will, is the ability to participate in a certain kind of interaction. It is certainly not to be thought of as some kind of collective mind. . . . The general will is then the expression of my common self, that is, of the self that I find, as the same self in myself and in others. . . . Far from being the expression of a single, unitary overarching collective consciousness, the general will is in fact the expression of the multiplicity and mutability of my being. . . . [it] is the thought of the humanness of the human being, ontological rather than (merely) moral . . . what I see when I see myself in you, you in me, and me in myself. . . . When acting on the general will, I then encounter myself as what I share with others, as human. This is what is meant by political society. (Strong, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Politics of the Ordinary* [1994], 2nd ed. [Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002], 34, 79–85)

Richard Vernon explains the idea of the general will in Rousseau’s *Social Contract* somewhat differently:

while “will” introduces the notion of voluntary obedience, the assent of autonomous individuals to rules of association and behavior, “generality” introduces, rather, a reminiscence of classical virtue, of cohesiveness and public devotion, and of the thorough absorption of the individual by an admired community. As the bearer of will the individual *obeys* the requirements of citizenship; as a bearer of the spirit of generality, he *is* a citizen, and conformity (rather than obedience) to a common good is simply the medium in which he lives. (Vernon, *Citizenship and Order: Studies in French Political Thought* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986], 49)

57. The definitions of *utilité publique* in this chapter come from (1) historical studies, esp. Jean Belin, *La Notion d’utilité publique en droit administratif français* (Paris: Dalloz, 1933) and *La Logique d’une idée-force: L’Idée d’utilité sociale pendant la Révolution française (1789–1792)* (Paris:

negotiating the conflicting desires of its citizens and in pursuing the public good as well as the public interest, as determined by principles such as equality and freedom.⁵⁸ Under the aegis of public utility, late nineteenth-century republicans, building on the ideas of Cicero, Helvétius, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and others, empowered the state to claim authority and justify its actions in many domains, from Haussmann's expropriation of land to the support of music, thereby helping to form a new society. In this way, public utility became a persistent and significant force in French culture (tables 1 and 2).

This focus on utility has created a logic underlying public institutions and a means of holding them accountable. Cicero, building on Greek ideas, believed that all laws should have *utilitas rei publicae* as their goal, and that public institutions should be appreciated because of their public utility. Since 1677, *utilité publique* has described a specific kind of relationship between individuals and their society inscribed in French law. In the law, "the activity of the general will,"⁵⁹ it is not needs that are addressed so much as interests. *Utilité publique* refers to the role of

Hermann, 1939); and Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*; (2) legal sources, such as Gérard Cornu, *Vocabulaire juridique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996); André de Laubadère et al., *Traité de droit administratif* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1988); and *Juris-Classeur administratif*, 5th ed. (Paris: Editions techniques, 1997); and (3) dictionaries, including Louis Guilbert and René Lagane, *Grand Larousse de la langue française*, vol. 7 (Paris: Larousse, 1978); Alain Rey, ed., *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Paris: Robert, 1993); and *Trésor de la langue française*, vol. 16 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

58. While Anglo-Saxons tend to assume that the individual preexists the community and that the source of legitimacy lies primarily in the individual, French republicans have conceived of the state as preexisting its members, thereby giving it certain powers as well as duties to serve the nation's needs.

In this chapter, I use the term "public good" (*bien public*; also known as the "common good") to mean a country's goods, services, and resources that serve the general interest of the people, usually a product of political decision-making. This ideal and the Anglo-Saxon concept of public goods, more specifically economic in nature, have in common the characteristics of non-excludability/nonexclusivity (that is, the benefits are available to all) and nonrivalry (consumption by one person does not preclude consumption by another). Although most public goods stop short of these ideals (and, as such, are impure public goods), the term refers only to goods and services with positive utility and positive externalities. With the public good and public goods (like national defense and clean air), political decisions can lead to exceptions to the logic of the market. Some public goods, such as knowledge and music, are not necessarily financed or controlled by the state. For fuller explanation of public goods, a concept first theorized by Paul Samuelson in 1954, see Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg, and Marc Stern, "Defining Global Public Goods," and Ismail Serageldin, "Cultural Heritage as Public Good: Economic Analysis Applied to Historic Cities," in *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*, ed. Kaul, Grunberg, and Stern (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3–6, 254–55. I'm grateful to Rob Lempert for pointing me to this book.

59. Strong, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 85.

TABLE 1. Usefulness

Objects, actions, organizations	→	Useful relationship (serves, satisfies needs and/or desires; communicates value, importance, wealth)	→	Needs and/or desires of individuals or society
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TABLE 2. Public Utility

Private interests of individuals or organizations				
	↓			
Moral personality of a collective body (people's shared interests, what the community values)				
	↓			
Common will	→	Public utility (defines and shapes, contains or limits general interest, distinguishing it from private interests)	→	General interest, public good

government, whose duty (and utility) lie in serving the general interests (*intérêt général*) of those otherwise divided by class, politics, region, profession, religion, and temperament. The idea that the social utility of goods and services should take priority over their personal utility provides a key to understanding French notions of government up to the present. Colbert, Louis XIV's prime minister, believed that it is incumbent upon society to accomplish what individuals cannot. That is, the state should take initiatives for the common good when individuals' efforts are insufficient. By making it part of the common law, *utilité publique* could serve as a legitimating tactic, justifying the government's actions even if only for the sake of appearances, such as when the state took over the tapestry and mirror-making companies. Asserting that the state's interests take precedence over individual interests, it could also be used to surmount any opposition and to appease the bourgeoisie who owned these companies. This signals a transition away from the absolute power and authority of the king, who was thought to embody the will of God, and whose motives no one would question.

By the eighteenth century, *utilité publique* had become “the supreme law,” a criterion for judging anything involving the public domain.⁶⁰ The philosopher Helvétius made the concept fashionable in his popular *De l'esprit* (1758), in which he used it to criticize despotism and to argue for a “public” or notion of the state separate from the person of the king.⁶¹ His thesis revolved around the idea that “interest” dictates our judgment. It determines whether one values or scorns actions or ideas. Like some of his English contemporaries and Jeremy Bentham after him, he hoped to conceive of a way to link individual interests with those of society as a whole. If perfection for Helvétius meant harmonizing our personal pleasure as fully as possible with the interests of others, then (echoing Descartes) to be virtuous meant being useful to others.⁶² Because Helvétius believed that man is a product of social and therefore changeable circumstances more than fixed or geographical ones,⁶³ he thought that education could accomplish this fusion of individual and general interests. Along with Bentham, Cesare Beccaria, and others inspired by the latter, he saw legislators as potential pedagogues, and morality and legislation as “one and the same science.” Ideally, the principle of public utility would ensure that governmental actions, however vaguely defined, benefited the good of the greatest number.

As the definition of general interest and the collective needs of the nation evolved, the separation of public and private realms became increasingly ambiguous. The concept of *utilité publique* played a critical role in helping writers and politicians negotiate this evolution and reconceive their society. Extending some basic ideas in Helvétius, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made it an integral part of his new political theory. In both his essay on the political economy and his *Social Contract*, he conceptualized a close relationship between *utilité publique* and what he calls

60. See Turgot's *Encyclopédie* article of 1757.

61. Discussed in Halévy, *Formation du radicalisme philosophique*, vol. 1: *La Jeunesse de Bentham, 1776–1789*, 27–31, and Pierre Rosanvallon, “L'Utilitarisme français et les ambiguïtés de la culture politique pré-révolutionnaire (position d'un problème),” in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 1: *The Political Culture of the Old Regime*, ed. Keith Baker (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987), 435–40. Rosanvallon notes that this text was one of the most often read in the thirty years before the Revolution.

62. Say and Chailley, “Helvétius,” *Nouveau dictionnaire* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1891), 1:1127.

63. For the same reason, Helvétius and many of his followers believed that inequalities ascribed to women were a result of social conditioning rather than physiology and as such could be changed. Halévy, *Jeunesse de Bentham*, 30. Note that in the section of his *Mémoires, ou Essais sur la musique* (New York: Da Capo, 1971), on the influence of the physical on the moral (3: 83–86), the composer André-Ernest-Modest Grétry takes issue with Helvétius's *De l'esprit*. He thinks that Helvétius overestimated the power of education to change a person, especially his or her health.

the sovereign power.⁶⁴ For him, *utilité publique* both contains sovereign power, establishing its limits in the public domain, and articulates the border between public and private, providing a rationale for private “sacrifices” or encroachments into the private domain.

Analogously, Rousseau believed that laws should not reflect a specific leader’s will, but that of the people. Sovereignty thus resides not in one individual (i.e., an all-powerful king), but in the common will (*volonté générale*) (see table 2). The common will results from the shared values and interests of the collective body—or what he calls its “moral personality.” In Rousseau’s theory, then, common will both determines what is in the general interest of the people and unites them into a political entity. It also helps produce the feeling of social solidarity.⁶⁵ Such a system has the advantage of joining people without forcing them to give up their rights; however, its dependence on the country’s leaders and their determination of the public interest contains a fundamental weakness, which Rousseau was not to solve.

The Revolution built on these ideas, and the Constitution of 3 September 1791 accustomed people to reflecting on social phenomena.⁶⁶ This document allows for social distinctions among free and equal men, but only based on their *utilité commune*, that is, their virtues and talents. This belief underlies the critical role competitions have played in anything regulated by the state since then (see chapter 4 below). Inspired by Rousseau, revolutionary leaders charged their government to “form a people that is the most virtuous, the most enlightened, the wisest.”⁶⁷ Utility became one of their most effective arguments for taking action. Virtually all revolutionary laws were written with the *intérêt général* of the people as their goal and purpose. They invoked *utilité sociale* to press for or explain a wide range of decisions, expenses, and activities, including the protection of forests, the free flow of capital, the separation of administrative and judiciary responsibilities, the

64. “The sovereign power that has the common good [*intérêt général*] as its object has no limits except those of public utility. . . . Public utility renders the sacrifices that public powers require of individuals both legitimate and obligatory.” Cited in Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 344–51.

65. See n. 56 above.

66. This constitution posits that for the rights of men and citizens to be guaranteed, there needs to be a “force publique” instituted for the advantage of all, not the “utilité particulière” of those in charge. Its purpose is to express the common will (*volonté générale*). See Belin, *Logique d’une idée-force* and E. Halévy, *La Formation du radicalisme philosophique: La Révolution et la doctrine d’utilité (1789–1815)* (Paris: Alcan, 1900).

67. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, in id., *Œuvres complètes* (Dijon: Darantière, 1959), 1: 404–5.

defense of borders, the National Guard, and the importance of art. Utility also emerged as a way of defending science because it offered either power over nature or something to improve daily life.⁶⁸ Arguing for music's *utilité publique* in "producing a good effect on the national character," in 1793, revolutionary statesmen approved the creation of the first national conservatory of music.⁶⁹

The vague, malleable qualities underlying utility thus allowed leaders to respond to changing circumstances and political ideologies even if, after the year XII (1803–4), the general will and *utilité publique* were determined by concrete cases, not by any general formula. Because of their *utilité publique*, the government could take charge of areas left to the private domain under the Ancien Régime, including religion and education. One of the most significant developments in the history of this concept was article 649 of the 1804 Civil Code (and the opinion rendered by the Conseil d'Etat, 17 June 1806). This article established the range of *utilité publique*'s influence and the extent of its controls and limits on the exercise of state power. Both to recognize and to control private organizations whose existence the state wished to support, this law granted them a *déclaration* or *reconnaissance d'utilité publique*.⁷⁰ To win this status, groups had to demonstrate that they fulfilled a public need and contributed to the public good (*bien public*). In return, they received legal benefits, but were also subject to supervision and the rules of common law. The first request for this designation came from a women's charitable organization in 1809. In 1901, another law made *utilité publique* consubstantial with the notion of an association.

As the public domain expanded, leaders increasingly invoked the notion of *utilité publique*. It was especially useful in determining the boundaries of the private domain. For example, whereas an 1838 law recognized a Frenchman's right to own property, an 1841 law limited it in the case of "expropriation pour cause d'utilité publique" (state appropriation or compulsory public purchase for reasons

68. In his "Applied Natural History and Utilitarian Ideals: 'Jacobean Science' at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, 1789–1870," in *Re-creating Authority in Revolutionary France*, ed. Bryant Ragan Jr. and Elizabeth Williams (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press), 129–43, Michael Osborne explains that "for a substantial body of revolutionary scientists, 'utile' was something that demarcated their own science from romantic misconceptions like Mesmerism and thus freed humanity of its prejudices" (130).

69. See Sarrette's "Petition for the Creation of a National Institute of Music" read to the Convention on 8 November 1793, reprinted in Constant Pierre, ed., *Le Conservatoire national de musique et de déclamation: Documents historiques et administratifs* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1900), 88–90. The Institut became the Conservatoire on 3 August 1795.

70. This was significant because since 1791, when all associations of people from the same class (*état*) were abolished, there had been a fear of collective organizations.

of public utility).⁷¹ Accordingly, the state could take possession of private property for the greater social good if the collective interests were not temporary but long-lasting, and if the state paid the property's owners, property being considered since 1791 a useful thing, but not a right. In the nineteenth century, perhaps the most significant application of this law resulted in Haussmann's reconfiguration of Paris. Appealing to an 1850 law about unhealthy buildings and another from 1852 allowing for expropriation for public works, Haussmann had only to borrow money and answer his numerous critics to fulfill his and Napoléon III's dream of a new Paris that was easier to control.

As public became synonymous with public interest, the state brought under its aegis any enterprise having *utilité publique*. From this principle, the notion of public service emerged. Laws passed in 1873 established public service as a central part of the administration. An activity could become a public service when it satisfied a need involving the general interest.⁷² In this spirit, the government took over French mines in 1880 and the transportation industries somewhat later (paving the way for the metropolitan subway system beginning in 1898). As the state looked for more control over organized religion, it created a position of minister of religious cults. After laws passed in the 1880s ruled that all children must go to school, and that secular public schools would be free, education became a public service.⁷³

Any organization or activity that could argue for its educational value could receive support from the state. When the arts were formally placed under the jurisdiction of the minister of public instruction in 1870, they entered the domain of a public service.⁷⁴ With this in mind, as arts administrator Gustave Larroumet notes,

71. In the United States, this is called the law of eminent domain. In his *Le Droit de l'expropriation pour cause d'utilité publique* (Bordeaux: Delmas, n.d.), Georges Ferrière points to early examples of this practice by Philip le Bel in 1303 and Henri IV in 1607 (22–23). For how this concept was understood in nineteenth-century France, see Gustave Sabatier, *Traité de l'expropriation pour cause d'utilité publique* (1859), Edmond Picard, *Traité général de l'expropriation pour utilité publique* (Paris: Larcier, 1875), and Pierre Avril, *Les Origines des établissements publics et des établissements d'utilité publique* (Paris: Rousseau, 1900); for how this law is applied today, see Denis Lévy, "Réflexions sur la notion d'utilité publique," in *Service public et libertés: Mélanges offerts au professeur Robert-Edouard Charlier* (Paris: Editions de l'Université et de l'enseignement moderne, 1981), 195–204, and Conseil d'Etat, *L'Utilité publique aujourd'hui* (Paris: Documentation française, 1999).

72. Belin, *Logique d'une idée-force*, 367; André de Laubadère et al., *Traité de droit administratif*. See also J. Chevalier, *Le Service public* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2003), and René Rizzardo, "En quoi l'enseignement musical spécialisé relève-t-il (ou pas) de la notion de service public?" in *Enseigner la musique*, no. 4: *L'Avenir de l'enseignement spécialisé de la musique* (2000): 27–32 and the discussion that follows, 33–43.

73. As Claude Nicolet points out in his *La République en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), teachers, as government employees, are not at the "service" of their students, but of the state, or the general interest (68).

74. This recalls the Latin source of the word "minister," meaning someone who serves.

“the state purchased artworks as it purchased books, formed museums as it formed libraries, and taught the arts as it taught literature and the sciences.”⁷⁵ The government also supported music. Declaring the construction of a new opera house, the Palais Garnier, of *utilité publique* on 29 September 1860 was necessary before an architect could be selected and ground broken. Each year in the budget discussions of the Assemblée nationale in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, deputies cited their *utilité publique* as the main reason for continuing the annual subsidies of the Opéra and Opéra-Comique. Larroumet explains: “The truth is that our dramatic and musical heritage is part of the nation’s wealth and that without the state’s protection, this heritage from the past would weaken and not grow in the present. Theaters supply a certain kind of teaching in the realm of the arts, and subsidizing them amounts to providing a public service.”⁷⁶

This way of thinking also applied to individual initiatives addressing social needs. In 1795, citing their *utilité publique*, the Convention created the Hôpital Saint-Antoine for the poor and disadvantaged and recognized Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s zoological Ménagerie for observing animals. The state likewise acknowledged smaller organizations—public baths, municipal gymnasiums, and especially groups advocating something it wished to encourage. These ranged from geographical societies to the Alliance française and various associations promoting education, science, agriculture, and commerce. Over the years, numerous arts organizations have sought this status, including the Société des artistes français, started in 1882 and recognized in 1883 for its annual exhibitions of French art.

In the musical world, obtaining official approval through a *déclaration d’utilité publique* especially helped concert organizations. One of the earliest such groups was the Société des concerts de chant classique (Fondation Beaulieu), founded in 1860 and recognized in 1867, not only for its contributions to musicians’ retirements, but also for its concerts of vocal music by deceased composers. In 1888, even the private composers’ organization, the Société nationale de musique, asked to be declared an *établissement d’utilité publique*.⁷⁷ Today, for the very same reason, the Concerts

75. Gustave Larroumet, *L’Art et l’Etat* (Paris: Hachette, 1895), 291–92.

76. *Ibid.*, 264.

77. To obtain this status, the process began with an investigation and formal reports reviewed by the Conseil municipal, the prefect of police, the prefect of the Seine, and the minister of the interior. The organization had to prove that it had existed for at least three years, so that its previous activities could be examined for their utility, and that its resources were sufficient to allow it to continue. The Société nationale was required to present a history of its organization, its goals, founders, statutes, financial resources, and activities. In a document signed by Franck, Fauré, Vidal, Tiersot, and Chabrier, the Société argued that it had been an “artistic and patriotic foundation” for seventeen years, during which time it had presented six hundred premieres of new French works. As such, it functioned as “a kind of experimental music school [*école d’application*]

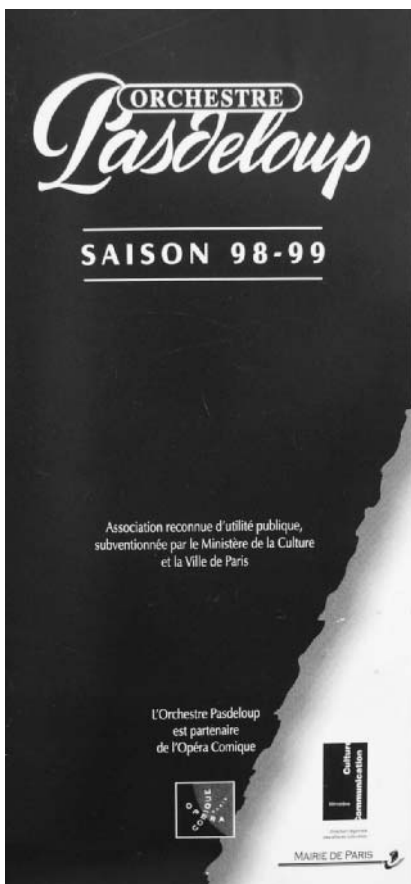


FIG. 16 Concerts Pasedeloup program, 1998–99.

The text on the brochure announcing their 1998–99 season reads: “Association recognized for its public utility, subsidized by the Ministry of Culture and the City of Paris.” This indication still appeared on the cover of their brochures in 2007.

Pasedeloup receives a state subsidy for performing orchestral music (fig. 16).⁷⁸ Such recognition has also been given to charitable foundations and professional societies providing retirements funds and care for workers in the case of sickness. Two such groups, the Association des artistes musiciens, founded in 1843, and a similar organization for painters, sculptors, and other visual artists, founded in 1840, were

musicale] helping its composers to perfect their art.” Playing into the republican interests of the Conseil municipal, who would have noted the quasi-private nature of their concerts, they noted that in the future the Société would like to bring its music to “popular audiences” so that they too “can judge the progress of national art.” Bibliothèque nationale, Musique, Rés F. 994 (D. 13, 21).

78. Other more recent organizations receiving a “déclaration d’utilité publique” for their musical contributions include the Fondation Singer-Polignac (1928), Les Amis de Lili Boulanger (1971), the Fondation Cziffra (1975), the Académie internationale de musique Maurice Ravel in Cibourne (1975), and the Société musicale russe en France (1983).

recognized for their public utility in 1876 and 1881, respectively. The crucial requirement has been convincing state administrators that, while carrying out its mission in the private domain, the organization is voluntarily fulfilling a genuine social need.

Organizations of *utilité publique* collaborate as partners in the administration of public services. The state can give them money, but it does not assume their debts. Although a *déclaration* makes such organizations accountable to the state in some way, they remain private, responsible for their own artistic and budgetary decisions. Because the state recognized an increasing number of associations in late nineteenth-century France, people were inevitably aware that the private domain could benefit by serving public needs. This contributed to building a strong foundation for democracy, with public and private efforts alike serving the public interest and the public good. However, these institutions also helped the state maintain its power and set the context for both rising socialism and reactionary resistance.

THE POWER OF *UTILITÉ PUBLIQUE*

The idea of utility has thus served the French well over the centuries. Because it depends on the perception of the country's needs, it could protect the status quo. More often it was invoked to promote change. Whereas in the eighteenth century, it led people to reevaluate the relationship of pleasure to happiness and goodness, it also forced revolutionaries to come to grips with needs the state had to serve in replacing the Church, particularly in primary education. If Cousin criticized the principle of general interest by pointing out that it could also “produce great crimes,” if he worried about “a single class of duties, duties towards others” with no “duties towards ourselves,” and if he pointed out that utility is never the “sole measure of the goodness of actions,”⁷⁹ nonetheless these ideas helped set the terms for a revolution in values—the liberty, equality, and fraternity that made the people, the working classes, an important part of the nation.

Since the Revolution, when this concept began to dominate all French administrative law, many French politicians and public administrators have construed their principal purpose as the fulfillment of *utilité publique*. For those in control, it has helped determine what laws were necessary and, increasingly over the years, how to balance the various legitimate, albeit conflicting, needs of society. At the same time, it aided in the growth and centralization of the state and provided a way to explain (or rationalize) state initiatives or forays into the private domain. Private organizations, too, have invoked the concept, especially when soliciting recogni-

79. Cousin, *Lectures*, 238, 265–68. On p. 307, he takes on Helvétius's ethics directly.

tion for their efforts at serving the public interest. In the nineteenth century, in particular, when the public and private were constantly being reevaluated, utility defined the terrain where the two spheres met and sometimes overlapped. Under the aegis of public utility, both state administrators and private groups could articulate and justify their functional needs and desires—money, buildings, and land—as well as their symbolic ones—official recognition or public approval, preservation of tradition or promotion of progress, patriotic pride or national identity. Both could assert that certain actions were respectable and in the country’s general interest and that others were not. *Utilité publique* thus articulated the site of contention where their conflicting interests inevitably clashed, the space of negotiation for everything political.

The significance of *utilité publique* comes in part from how, to the extent that it addressed the collective interests of the French people, it helped create the nation. Revolutionaries understood the nation as more than its territory, the inheritance of its monuments and museums, its laws and symbols, its military victories, and its language.⁸⁰ To replace the king, in their 1791 Constitution, they made the nation the “principle of sovereignty.” Rousseau had understood that this was not based on unity, but on shared needs and desires translated in the common will. From the revolutionaries’ perspective, “the only titles one needed were the love of the public good and the desire to be useful to the country.”⁸¹ After the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, the French returned to this utopian notion of what determines a nation. As the history professor Fustel de Coulanges put it in 1870, more than race and language, what makes a country is “a community of ideas, interests, feelings, memories, and hopes.” These define the present, while race and history represent the past. In his 1882 essay “What Is a Nation?” Ernest Renan likewise points to the importance of having a “shared program to realize”—his version of Rousseau’s “common will” that makes a nation into a “moral personality.” Renan also sees shared suffering as imposing duties “requiring an effort in common”: “To have suffered, rejoiced, hoped together—these are worth more than common customs and borders, these are what one understands in spite of diversity in race and language.”⁸² Through its orientation to the public good and the public interest, as articulated by the country’s shared needs and desires, the notion of

80. Categories studied in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–92).

81. Belin, *Logique d’une idée-force*, 293.

82. Fustel de Coulanges, “L’Alsace est-elle allemande ou française?” (1870) and Ernest Renan in a lecture at the Sorbonne, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” (1882) reproduced in Raoul Girardet, *Le Nationalisme français* (Paris: Colin, 1966), 62–67.

utilité publique was associated with both the fatherland (*patrie*)—serving what one loved—and the happiness or well-being (*bonheur*) that resulted from having one’s needs satisfied.

Utility was a valuable tool in the discourse about the nation. Like the nation, utility represented hopes, desires, and emotional needs as well as an ideology created to address them. Just as legitimating a concept as the nation, it linked society and the state, allowing the two to be perceived as “the same,” the former “merging and being absorbed” in the latter⁸³—an idea with resonance in France as far back as the reign of Henri IV and possibly the Gallo-Roman period. Satisfying needs is not the same as controlling them, but as in any relationship between two closely identified entities, manipulation can go both ways. Utility, then, is not just descriptive of how the common will should determine the general interest. It can also be prescriptive of how desires can be educated and needs constructed to constitute the general interest. In this sense, it can be powerfully normalizing. In other words, if the state can respond to the needs of a majority of the people, it can also help shape the desires of these people so that they agree on their needs. To the extent that the state can increase appreciation (and therefore desire) for music through teaching singing in school, encouraging participation in amateur choruses, rewarding performance through competitions, and subsidizing opera and orchestral concerts for the lower classes, it can promote music as a shared interest of diverse people. This is the essence of the top-down theory of cultural hegemony, which includes the cultural paternalism underlying support for *orphéons* and the birth of *concerts populaires*.

Like the nation, however, utility is problematic in its claims at general representation. Belief in the common will and in people’s ability to comprehend it probably motivated the state more than the reality behind these concepts.⁸⁴ Still, since utility implies its own contingencies, it allows us to rethink citizenship and the nation as having contingencies and fluctuating identities that are dependent on a diversity of needs and desires. From this perspective, French notions of citizenship are not absolute or theoretical but rooted in history, subject to the needs and desires of those alive at any one time.⁸⁵

To the extent that it tolerates diverse needs and desires, the concept of *utilité*

83. Albert Duruy, *L’Instruction publique et la démocratie, 1877–1886* (Paris: Hachette, 1886), 312.

84. Numerous historians have pointed out the social and economic inequities not accounted for in the revolutionary concept of the citizen and in the eventual domination of the state by the bourgeoisie.

85. I agree with the critic Max Silverman who, in his *Facing Postmodernity: Contemporary French Thought on Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 1999), points out that the nation-state should not be the primary context for consideration of citizenship.

publique also allows us to explore the limitations of this top-down perspective. In certain contexts, for example, private music organizations took on the role of the state and sought to promote very different interests. In the 1890s, frustrated with the lack of renewal in the national theaters, the aristocratic Société des grandes auditions musicales de France had the connections and the money to produce some of the first staged performances of Berlioz's and Wagner's operas in France well in advance of the state's productions at the Palais Garnier. Because these productions provided an ideal of what some thought art and the public good should be, some critics praised the society as "eminently useful" and accused subsidized theaters of being "useless" to the cause of art because of their apathy and bureaucratic structures.⁸⁶ The taste for art music thus sometimes "trickled up" from private organizations to influence state-supported institutions.

This points to how the concept of utility addressed the challenges of the nation in a uniquely French way. French of all political persuasions claimed to be serving *utilité publique* in the lively and ongoing debates over whose interests would be seen as society's interests, whose values the state would embrace and support. When the politicians who called themselves opportunist republicans (*républicains opportunistes*) rose to power in the late 1870s, but proved unable to meet society's needs, debates over what was in the general interest of the people gave rise in the late 1880s to new antirepublican nationalism, alongside republican nationalism, and in the early 1890s to political alliances between conservative republicans and royalists. Nationalism, or invoking the general interests of the nation, functioned as a domestic political weapon to attack both opponents of the state and, by the end of the century, the Republic itself.⁸⁷ From the perspective of *utilité publique*, however, the only real "enemy" was anyone who wished to spend public resources on unnecessary luxuries.

The significance of *utilité publique* also derives from its function as a sign of social goodness. This made it a basis for comparison, a kind of standard. In some contexts, it also became a criterion for judgment, for asserting value in the community. In describing the "principles and utility of the 1889 Exhibition," for example, organizers saw the event as "useful" to the extent that it demonstrated "French superiority" in a wide range of products, a reflection of "the taste and talent of [France's] manufacturers."⁸⁸ With public concerns inflecting those of private individuals in the nineteenth century, people increasingly invoked the useful to attract

86. "La Société des grandes auditions," *Art musical*, 15 April 1890, 51.

87. Robert Tombs, preface to *Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangerism to the Great War, 1889–1918*, ed. id. (London: Harper Collins, 1991), xi.

88. "Principes générales et utilité des expositions universelles," *Moniteur de l'Exposition de 1889*, 21 April 1889.

attention to what should be valued from small and almost insignificant objects and actions to great and important ones. As such, utility was also considered a form of knowledge.

In this regard, “useful” was often linked not to “pleasurable,” as it had been for Horace and eighteenth-century philosophers, but to “interesting”—interest being a criterion (since Helvétius) for determining whether something was worthy of one’s attention. For example, feeding their readers’ desire for continuing education, monthly magazines advertised “useful and interesting complements to their arid studies in the past.”⁸⁹ While many family magazines reproduced or made available to their subscribers musical scores whose “attractiveness and utility will be appreciated,”⁹⁰ reciprocally music magazines tended to have short biographies and portraits of people in the news, as well as summaries of current events. By the century’s end, the taste for “indispensable savoir-faire” led *La Vie de famille* to publish a regular section, “Useful Knowledge” (*Connaissances utiles*). This included medical advice, travel information, science games, and tips for the homemaker—such as how to get grease out of sheets and restore old paintings. Just like *La Famille* and *La Vie de famille*, the *Album musical*, a monthly collection of musical scores, included a “Financial Conversation” its editors thought would be “useful to their readers” and “interest them” because it discussed stock market fluctuations.⁹¹ Any information addressing a legitimate need was considered “useful”—a useful reform, useful work, useful initiative, useful explanations. Usefulness was understood not merely in terms of helping satisfy a need; the need in question had to be justifiable and potentially shared with others.

Simply arguing that something was useful in the nineteenth century, however, should never be taken at face value, for rarely were assertions of utility or usefulness neutral. Brandishing these words could shield a group or interest from scrutiny when there were competing political, economic, or social agendas. *Utilité publique* could parade as negotiating competitive interests while serving only one. Moreover, it easily implied rendering or evaluating a service that the public *should* desire or need, not necessarily one that many agreed was in the common interest. This has often been a problem with social policy dictated from on high. It also could mask market forces, conformism, and habits capable of influencing people’s perception of their needs and desires. When it came to the arts, the advantage brought by something useful could go both ways. The state, like artists themselves, could benefit from certain actions, such as those that reinforced the

89. See, e.g., *La Vie de famille* (1898).

90. *L’Album musical de la famille*, advertised in *La Famille*, 12 October 1879, 210.

91. *Album musical*, August–September 1906.

status quo rather than questioned it. Determining the public interest is problematic when the utility, or the logic for invoking it, is circular. *Utilité publique*, conceived in this way, sometimes reflects a certain impotence or insularity in the systems that invoke it. In all situations concerning *utilité publique*, then, we should ascertain which public it addresses and what kind of social significance its proponents seek to achieve.

Consequently, we should not dismiss this crucial concept in European culture or assume we understand it at face value. Usefulness is broad in its capacity to signify, and effective in helping us better to understand the democratic forces of the Third Republic and French culture since then. Depending on one's perspective, at its extremes, *utilité publique* could imply a stifling action, calling for the surrender of individual interests to the common will, as in the case of expropriating private property. But it could also protect and empower the community to defend itself from the undue power of certain individuals. Utility legitimates the concept of the social and social needs without relying on the assumption of natural differences between social classes. In France, it harks back to revolutionary ideals that point to difference as a matter of access to resources and experience rather than innate privilege. *Utilité publique* provides a way to conceive of a broader sense of the French people and to understand more than the needs and desires of their elites. This is particularly relevant in studying music, especially if we are to get beyond the prejudice that historians have long imbued in us that art music is, fundamentally, of and for elites.

MUSIC AS *UTILITÉ PUBLIQUE*

If French musicians have escaped the kind of vitriolic attack that Hindemith, for example, met with in Germany in the 1920s, it is in part because of how music's utility has been construed in France. Whereas German scholars, writing in a tradition that values metaphysics, developed the term *Gebrauchsmusik* to describe music that serves social functions or engages people through active participation more than aesthetic contemplation,⁹² the French have needed no such category. Few French have gone as far as the Second Viennese School composers in their

92. For an excellent essay on *Gebrauchsmusik*, see Stephen Hinton's entry in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie et al. (New York: Grove, 2001). Unlike the scholars who promoted this term, Hinton points out that music's use-value and its autonomy are not necessarily mutually exclusive. When critics such as Adorno claimed that the only use music can serve in capitalist society is that of a commodity, they were showing how limited their concept of the useful was.

In his *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964),

claims about autonomous concert music, against which *Gebrauchsmusik* composers were reacting. Artistic value in France is not as linked to musical autonomy. Opera has historically been the most highly supported art in France, and certain kinds of *musique d'occasion*, such as that written for revolutionary festivals, have been broadly appreciated. Generally speaking, in France, the useful in music is what links sound to society, music to the community.

As they envisaged bringing together republican government and democracy, leaders of the Third Republic looked to ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy for “triumphant examples of what the alliance of art, religion, and the state can do.”⁹³ They sought an explicit relationship between music and the state, the basis of its *utilité publique*. Democracies, as Tocqueville pointed out, are not just a form of government, a regime of reason, or a set of laws, but, above all, a way of life. They have their own *mœurs* (from the Latin *mores*), the habits, attitudes, or implicit norms that determine what is considered just or unjust, good or evil, desirable or undesirable,⁹⁴ distinct from those of aristocracies. What characterizes democracies, above all, is “the equality of conditions,” even if “equality places men beside one another without a common bond to hold them.”⁹⁵ French republicans were looking for ways to both shape democratic *mœurs* in the country and build such bonds. They understood music—an art, a form of sensibility, a kind of knowledge, and a practice—as able to contribute to the *mise en forme* and the *mise en scène* of the new society. In this sense, music could be politically useful, especially if the political means an ensemble of principles that generate relationships among people. This does not mean that it was reduced to its *utilité publique*, just as for Plato, education was not reducible to its political function. Critics continued to foreground music’s aesthetic qualities. But, in engaging and reflecting individual as well as public

Alan Merriam distinguishes between use and function, the former referring to “the situation in which music is employed in human action,” the latter to “the reasons for its employment and particularly the broader purpose that it serves” (210). I tend to agree with the cognitive neuroscientist Steven Brown who, in discussing these, argues that use emanates from function in his “Introduction: ‘How Does Music Work?’ Toward a Pragmatics of Musical Communication,” in *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music* (New York: Berghahn 2006), ed. id. and Ulrik Volgsten, 1–25. This stimulating volume explores the negative as well as the positive social uses of music in our time.

93. In his *Lectures*, Cousin understood this relationship to be without the “servitude of art” (163).

94. Claude Lefort, *Essais sur le politique, XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 9. Tocqueville explains *mores* as “the different notions that men possess, the various opinions that are current in their midst, and the sum of ideas of which the habits of the mind are formed,” in other words, “the whole moral and intellectual state of a people” (*Democracy in America*, 275).

95. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 3, 485.

taste and having personal as well as social meaning, music supported the duality characteristic of democracies, individual freedom together with collective action. For a society that considered ideology and culture as integral aspects of politics,⁹⁶ after 1871, certain aspects of music and musical practices, as we shall see, arguably bore the “imprint” of politics.

The founders of liberal democracy recognized that universal suffrage was a bold, difficult, and uncertain project. It had been tried before and failed.⁹⁷ Leaders of the Third Republic looked to music to contribute to its success in four principal ways.

1. *Music could discipline private desires and internalize public virtues.*⁹⁸ French who understood the ear as the “intellectual faculty”⁹⁹ regarded music as a mode of learning and assimilating values. Listening could involve rational processes like discrimination and empirical comparison and call on the imagination for the interpretation of meaning. Germany offered important models for how to use music to cultivate virtues, especially through music education. German singing manuals were admired throughout the nineteenth century because they offered not only a systematic pedagogy, but also texts promoting values likewise esteemed in France (love of work, devotion to country, the greatness of God). After the Franco-Prussian war, French music educators continued to borrow German songs (e.g., by Abt, Gläser, Nägeli, and Silcher) and teach them in the schools.¹⁰⁰ Like their European and American counterparts, French officials recognized music’s intellectual, moral, and physical functions: while bringing us pleasure, it enlivens the intellect and memory, affects our mood, and, in singing it, strengthens our lungs and other vital organs.¹⁰¹ They acknowledged its capacity to further causes

96. My concept of politics here is indebted to Lefort’s *Essais sur le politique*, 7–14, 112, and François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

97. Félix Pécaut, *L’Éducation publique et la vie nationale* (Paris: Hachette, 1897), 126–27.

98. This is the first definition of civility, or civic virtue, in Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 281.

99. Adolphe Le Douclet, marquis de Pontécoulant, *Les Phénomènes de la musique, ou, L’influence du son sur les êtres animés* (Paris: Librairie internationale, 1868).

100. I analyze these in my next book.

101. An early nineteenth-century report stressing music’s capacity “to make people love virtue, calm the passions, soften manners, and civilize people” is M.-H. Boulay de la Meurthe, *Rapport au Conseil municipal de Paris sur l’introduction de l’enseignement du chant dans les écoles primaires communales*, 6 mars 1835. In his *High-Minded and Low-Down: Music in the Lives of Americans, 1800–1861* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), Nicolas Tawa, in a section entitled, “To Serve a Useful Purpose” (25–29), explains how Americans, too, understood music as serving to satisfy various biological, social, and imaginative needs.

and encourage patriotism as well as reveal the “unique character of a people of a nation.”¹⁰² After 1871, French leaders of all kinds looked to music for its potential in revitalizing people.

However, there were differences in what was sought from musical practices. In the nineteenth century, both German and French educators recognized that teaching music by imitation and rote memorization had its limits and needed reform. But whereas in Germany, new approaches focused on the connection between hearing, listening, and obeying, the “basic common ground of education” being what David Gramit has called an “internalization of obedience,” in Third Republic France, music education, like other kinds of education, was seen as a way to form citizens.¹⁰³ As political scientists have pointed out, citizenship means more than obedience to rules. A citizen cannot be “a creature who obeys a creature who wills” as Montesquieu put it. Citizenship refers more to the person than the prescriptions and implies an attitude that leads citizens to rely on their own judgment and to identify with what rules encode because they make sense.¹⁰⁴ French educators saw moral discipline as nurturing the health of the soul, helping one to order one’s instincts and impulses. Yet they considered teachers intellectual “liberators” more than disciplinarians, people who taught judgment so that citizens would then be free to “construct their own destiny.”¹⁰⁵ Republicans looked to education to “transform the obscure, anonymous, unconscious, and instinctive multitude into a people capable of examining and reflecting” and thus “governing themselves.”¹⁰⁶ The goal of their education thus was “forming vigorous character

102. David Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Gramit stresses the important of Herder and Schelling in this regard (41–45).

103. *Ibid.*, 118. As Gramit explains, referring to “disciplinary practice in Foucault’s sense,” in the early nineteenth century “Nägeli’s constant use of brief, frequently repeated exercises rather than larger musical pieces and his desire to banish evaluative aesthetic language from preliminary instruction likewise attest to the disciplinary character of the *Gesangbildungslehre*” (25, 108). Gramit sees the “larger Enlightenment goal of popular pedagogy” as part of the need for “rationalized and regulated forms of interaction associated with capitalist relations of production” (20). In France, obedience and belief were associated with the authority of the Catholic Church, which republicans wished to replace with individual judgment. See chapters 3 and 5 below. See also Noémi Lefebvre, “Education musicale et identité nationale en Allemagne et en France” (PhD diss., Université de Grenoble, 1994).

104. See n. 56 above on Rousseau’s notion of the general will, Vernon, *Citizenship and Order*, 2–3, and Descartes as discussed by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*.

105. Pécaut, *Education publique*, xvi. In his “Cours d’histoire générale de la musique, séance d’ouverture,” *Ménestrel*, 1 December 1878, L.-A. Bourgault-Ducoudray also asserted that instruction turned people into “real men” by “rendering their judgment free” (2).

106. Pécaut, *Education publique*, viii–ix.

and free conscience.”¹⁰⁷ Music could contribute to this effort. Not only was singing believed to attract children to school and make them love discipline and study, but musical performance was also perceived as enhancing a person’s dignity and self-respect. Music touches and moves “the common foundation of all virtues, the spontaneous energy of being, and the lively strength of the soul . . . the place where physical and moral life have common roots.”¹⁰⁸ Listening to as well as performing music, they believed, also taught judgment, a critical requirement of citizens, which helped give them “the sentiment of [their] own existence” as well as their existence in common with others.¹⁰⁹ As such, music was part of the political education that began in primary school. Along with literature, history, and the rest, it would help “the intellectual and moral dispositions of the young become part of the *esprit public* of a free state.”¹¹⁰ Republicans thus wished to engage music’s educational capacity to give people access to new, productive identities that would help build democracy.

2. *Music connected people to one another despite their heterogeneity.* In France, music has often been considered something cooperative. While Quatremère de Quincy wrote of music’s capacity to “arouse impressions, paint the passions, move, and please,” he stressed the role of the listener’s imagination in its perception: “Music may take us on the path to pleasure, but we still need to walk toward it; it does not present us with ready-made images; it makes us realize them within ourselves; we paint along with it; we collaborate with it; we are actors in its action and only receive the pleasure it provides us by contributing to it, which is to say that music has no effect upon those who do not cooperate with it.”¹¹¹

Thus the power of beauty for Quatremère resided not just in forms, but also in the capacity of the person “who receives the impressions.” From this idea, he pointed to the “correspondences” between art and the imagination, “without which the musical language is reduced to sounds,” and between the properties of one art and those of another—a concept Baudelaire was later to develop into an

107. Cf. Félix Pécaut, “La Musique ou le chant choral à l’école (1880), in id., *Éducation publique*, 117, and the German attitudes discussed in Gramit, *Cultivating Music*, 117–18.

108. Pécaut, “Musique ou le chant choral,” 118–19; *Rapport au Conseil municipal de Paris sur l’introduction de l’enseignement du chant dans les écoles primaires communales*, 2 avril 1843, 12, and “Mémoire adressé à M. Gréard, directeur de l’enseignement primaire du département de la Seine, en Novembre 1878 par M. A. Dupaigne,” in *Ministre de l’Instruction publique, Rapports*, 68, 75.

109. This idea harks back to Rousseau. See Strong, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 74–77.

110. Pécaut, *Éducation publique*, 126–29.

111. Quatremère de Quincy, *Considérations morales*, 76. See also 52–54.

aesthetic principle. Dependent on “the laws of *sympathie*” (empathy, or a certain connection between music and listener), music is thus more than metaphysics and “abstract knowledge.” Like French composers and critics who were preoccupied with music’s capacity to charm, that is, penetrate people’s hearts, minds, and bodies, both Quatremère and republicans focused on music’s ability to “move us” and what that connoted to them.¹¹² As one late nineteenth-century educator put it, “the harmony of its sounds awaken in us, like an involuntary echo, the sense of moral harmony, order, agreement, and thus perfection, that is, our dream and our destiny.”¹¹³ From this perspective, symphonies and music without text or narrative, too, could have *utilité publique*.

When an audience attends to a musical performance, they share something basic whether they are similarly moved or not. The experience mitigates their sense of isolation. Ideally, it can lead to compassion, a moral bond Tocqueville associates with democratic citizens.¹¹⁴ What concerned late nineteenth-century republicans was how music can help people of different classes, not just the same class, feel “solidarity,” forging bonds of fraternity through shared experiences and developing shared tastes.¹¹⁵ This would encourage them to identify with larger groups, and with the nation as a whole, despite their social, economic, religious, and political differences.¹¹⁶ Shared musical experiences build a community of feelings alongside the community of ideas, engendering a palpable sense of what it means to be a public. From a political perspective, to the extent that music leads people to respect and love the same things, it encourages them to hold to the common law.

Fraternity was encouraged, not only by listening with others, but especially by performing with them. Choral music was particularly important to republicans, both because it could be easily taught and because it made people want to come

112. *Ibid.*, 76–80.

113. Pécaut, “Musique ou le chant choral,” 118–19.

114. Mansfield and Winthrop, Introduction to Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, lxviii.

115. Pécaut, “Musique ou le chant choral,” 118. Tocqueville points out that while people within the same class tend to “consider themselves all as children of the same family” and thus “feel a continual and active sympathy for one another,” this is not the same “for the different classes vis-à-vis one another” in a democracy, who “cannot understand well what the others might feel” (*Democracy in America*, 535). In his “Rapport de M. Bourgault-Ducoudray” in *Ministre de l’Instruction publique, Rapports*, Bourgault-Ducoudray, advocating for universal musical education, suggests that music can mitigate these perceived differences: “Just as there is only one sun for the poor and the rich, there should only be one truth and one art. If feelings are common to all classes, then art expressing them should be practiced by all classes. From this will arise not only a community of perceived feelings, but also a community of manifested feelings. Nothing exalts or revives a feeling in our hearts more than to hear it expressed around us by those who share it” (26).

116. This is the second definition of civility in Pettit, *Republicanism*, 281.

together in voluntary association. There, in “mutual but partial dependence,” people influence one another: “the heart is enlarged and the human mind is developed.”¹¹⁷ Like Germans and German Americans, who had long understood the value of choral singing as a cooperative model of interaction, French republicans believed that, as a group effort, choral singing instills “solidarity, communion, and collective harmony, which are among the most important [attributes] to develop.”¹¹⁸ Louis-Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray, both a composer and an educator, felt that choral music alone could produce “that warmth of soul and spirit of cohesion” associated with republican “fraternity.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, choral singing is a palpable metaphor for citizenship, in that singers participate in a “shared situation that represents more than the triumph of one will over another.” Singing also gives people opportunities to show how they might “grasp and adapt their actions” to some mutually agreed-upon order.¹²⁰ The key concept here is the order empowered by fraternity, something in music more felt than analyzed, a physical experience as well as a model for the democratic ideal. The concept was powerfully normative but also, through its connection to the order of music, construed as natural.

French republicans went much further than German critics and educators in insisting that all classes of society have access to such experiences. Unlike in nineteenth-century Germany where, according to Gramit, the cultivation of music served two distinct goals—“producing obedient, productive subjects among the lower classes and capable, broadly educated administrators among the cultivated middle classes,” and where the notion of “all classes” often meant only the cultivated classes¹²¹—in the Third Republic, republicans were determined to break down the differences between “utilitarian education for the people” and “liberal education for the rich classes.” They threw into question the idea that “the people” do not have the time or the inclination to “wander in the useless splendors of the ideal.”¹²² Serious music did not have to be a luxury associated only with elites; republicans wanted all citizens to have access to the kind of deep experiences music can stimulate. “If there are feelings common to all the classes,” Bourgault-Ducoudray writes, then there should be an art as well. In this way, they hoped a

117. Mansfield and Winthrop, Introduction to Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, lxxii–lxxiii. Tocqueville considered voluntary associations “an indispensable supplement to government in a democracy.”

118. Pécaut, “Musique ou le chant choral,” 118–19.

119. “Rapport de M. Bourgault-Ducoudray,” 17.

120. Vernon, *Citizenship and Order*, 23.

121. Gramit, *Cultivating Music*, 117.

122. Pécaut, “Musique ou le chant choral,” 116.

union would result from “the community of not only feelings experienced, but also feelings expressed.”¹²³ Thus music’s social utility was not about dividing and regulating, objectifying relations between the classes and reinforcing hierarchies as in Germany and the United States.¹²⁴ Rather, it was valued for bringing the classes closer together, giving them ways to bridge their inequalities of background, and, in so doing, help solve the “social problem.”

3. *Given that the Third Republic itself was the result of a compromise, perhaps not surprisingly, republicans also looked to music to help people negotiate conflict and imagine new identities.* Conflict and competition are characteristic of democracies. In the Third Republic, citizens had to come to grips with both the inevitable ideological contradictions of the Republic’s double heritage (the Revolution and the Ancien Régime) and the social antagonisms between its conservative and progressive forces. Certainly, music helped people celebrate and affirm their beliefs, but it also offered a means of confronting these differences, as well as any underlying ambiguities, ironies, and paradoxes. Through music, one could resist both the weight of past traditions and the dominance of contemporary conventions. Through music, one could explore new kinds of being and imagine new futures for oneself and society. For example, scholars have often noted how repressive bourgeois values felt to many in late nineteenth-century France. As frustration with positivist, secular rationalism grew, a number of “movements” in elite and popular culture emerged that were critical of the artistic agendas of republicanism. Wagner’s music inspired symbolist poets and composers such as Debussy to focus on the inner experience it stimulated, the transcendence it encouraged. Wagnerians used music as a form of contemplation that stimulated self-growth for its own sake. But for those from the working class involved in amateur choral societies or wind bands, musical performance represented not only the possibility of social solidarity, self-improvement, and escape from the banality of everyday life, but also liberation from the prejudices commonly associated with the masses. When, in an annual competition of hundreds of choruses, a working-class ensemble from Belleville won over bourgeois choruses from wealthier parts of Paris, Tocqueville’s “equality of conditions,” created through the competitions,

123. “Rapport de M. Bourgault-Ducoudray,” 26.

124. See esp. Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), and Paul DiMaggio, “Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America,” in *Media, Culture, and Society* 4 (1982): 33–50 and 303–22.

made available to the previously disenfranchised the prestige and social benefits associated with art music.

4. *Music encouraged consensus amid uncertainty.* In his *Les Phénomènes de la musique, ou, L'influence du son sur les êtres animés* (1868), echoing Rousseau, L.-P.-A. Le Doulcet de Pontécoulant, an aristocratic music lover, sees music as “analogous to climate, language, customs, the characters and habits of a nation.”¹²⁵ Music, as part of the country’s heritage and a mode in which to understand French culture, records the country’s collective memory, especially important in a democracy, a form of society that is always changing. As Third Republic music historians put it, the history of the fine arts is “necessarily related to the general history of people” and constitutes “the most attractive and poetic” part of this history. Or, more precisely, “the history of French music in the nineteenth century is, to a much greater extent than political history and at least as much as social history, a moral revelation and an account of our diversity and our evolution.”¹²⁶ Pointing to the example of Charlemagne, who imposed a common chant tradition throughout France, republicans called on music to help “knit together or knit back together identity and national unity.”¹²⁷ To help French citizens imagine a common identity, however, they needed to reconceive their history, decontextualize and recontextualize their monarchist and revolutionary pasts, and trace an evolutionary path from the past to the present. This meant writing new music histories. The French also needed to feel renewed pride in their heritage. Musical genres, such as *opéra-comique*, touted as “quintessentially French” in the Assemblée nationale, and musical organizations, such as the Société nationale, founded to promote contemporary French music after 1871, were often praised for their utility in this regard.

The public played an important role in articulating consensus. Horace had taught that artists, while rising above all commercialism, should consult the taste and opinion of the public. They should have a relationship with those whom artists sought to “instruct and please” and should listen to them: “public approval should be their goal.”¹²⁸ Republicans, seeking to build a consensus that would represent the general interest of the people and legitimate the democracy, largely concurred. As Bourgault-Ducoudray put it: “The public is the majority, and the majority

125. Le Doulcet, *Les Phénomènes de la musique*, excerpt reprinted on the back cover of Joaquín Nin, *Idées et commentaires* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1912).

126. Gustave Chouquet, *Histoire de la musique dramatique en France* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1873), xv; Eugene Solenière, *Cent Années de musique française: Aperçu historique* (Paris: Pugno, 1901).

127. Larroumet, *Art et l'Etat*, 92.

128. Lalanne, *Art poétique d'Horace*, 44, 84.

makes the law. One can say that public taste is a touchstone that permits evaluation of the value and strength of the production of a period of time. . . . The public makes art and the artists what they are. Nothing is more useful in the interest of art than to see the public's taste rise and its aspirations grow."¹²⁹

In the 1870s, when royalists hoped to restore monarchy and republicans were struggling to win a majority, much was at stake in forging a consensus. Concerts that placed *la musique ancienne et moderne* in dialogue gave listeners opportunities to come to grips with and see value in conflicting ideals. Music and concerts thus could provide arguments for tolerance and reconciliation over the nature of French identity. In this sense, addressing the public did not mean just pleasing, but also challenging audiences and making them think. Because music was part of national industry and capable of contributing to the nation's wealth and glory, to the extent that it had broad appeal across national borders, it could also encourage mutual understanding among nations.

In what contexts these ideas arose, how they were understood, and how musicians addressed these potential utilities is the subject of this book. In it, I suggest that music can be a critical tool to help us understand cultural, social, political, and historical complexity and change. Musical creativity underlines the dynamic nature of democracies. The flux of taste reflects shifting conditions among heterogeneous constituencies.¹³⁰ Music articulates the ever-changing intersection of private and public interests and negotiates a delicate balance between them. It could do this because, unlike for the German romantics, the power and meaning many French saw invested in music came not only from music itself but also from how music, whether implicitly or explicitly, voiced and attempted to satisfy people's needs and desires, which were always changing. The concept of utility thus allows us to get at a "mechanism" that permits music to connote.¹³¹ As a property relating music to people's concerns and interests, it locates the nature of music's "symbolic, emotive, or corporeal force," allowing us to articulate when and why music was social.

Through its uses, music thus became part of French political consciousness. Like other forms of politics, it contributed to both the expression and the pursuit of republican ideals. This is not to say that everything about music was political, just as not everything about politics concerned culture. Music continued to

129. Bourgault-Ducoudray, "Cours d'histoire générale de la musique," 2–3.

130. Lefort, *Essais*, 25, 29.

131. In her *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Tia DeNora notes that scholars have often pointed out what they think the music connotes, but rarely located the "mechanism" that permits them to make these claims (30–31). I agree with the suggestion of Rousseau and Wittgenstein that use often teaches the meaning of something. See Strong, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 24.

be composed, performed, and listened to apart from the republican project and in resistance to it. Other forces besides the state also exerted power over music and musical practices. Still, if music could affect public *mœurs*, republican educators and political leaders sought ways to shape the conditions that would make this possible. The ideology of republicanism permeated every aspect of musical life, private as well as public musical practices, and most genres (except perhaps chamber music conceived for aristocratic salons). Focusing on music's utility sheds light on the conflicting needs and desires of the French—whether to secure the new democracy or return to a constitutional monarchy—that kept politics at the center of life.



If, by the end of the nineteenth century, there was increasing discomfort with the idea of music satisfying human, social, and national needs, it was not only state control and interference in private domains that were responsible. As art music became accessible and increasingly popular among all classes, some composers objected. Possibly frustrated with the expanded applications of utility to an increasingly banal set of objects and actions and concerned about the demands that music's popularity might make of composers, Debussy sniped, “art is absolutely useless to the masses.”¹³² In reacting this way to the emergence of mass culture, he was not alone. After 1900, this resistance took two forms. Some embraced luxuries for their own sake—for the pleasure they gave or the distinction associated with them—even if, as for Ravel, this could mean pursuing a “useless occupation.” Others made “useless” art or art conceived to satisfy the mundane needs of life, like Dada and Satie's *Furniture Music*.

Comments about anything “useless” in France should, therefore, give us pause. When it comes to understanding what set the stage for modernism, one should not assume that musical change resulted principally from the struggle for freedom of individual expression or the influence of Wagner. Although seemingly insignificant, utility gives us a fresh way to understand the history of France as well as the hermeneutics of French musical life at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1875, in his multivolume study of Paris, Maxime du Camp remarks: “One could say without exaggerating that the more a people has needs, the more it is civilized, because civilization is the culmination of the combined intelligence and demands

132. Claude Debussy, “A propos of Charles Gounod,” from *Musica* (1906), in *Debussy on Music*, ed. Richard Langham Smith (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977), 224.

of everyone. Can you imagine Paris without its theaters, libraries, and newspapers . . . its public administrations, particular institutions, and the individuals that give life to these organisms?”¹³³

Because addressing needs underlies much of French culture, we should remember that, along with rationality, order, and the controversy over luxury, utility represents the continuity of Enlightenment and revolutionary ideals up to present-day France. In the next chapter, I examine the origins of the republican ideology empowered by this concept, the specific national needs revolutionaries expected music to address, and the particular qualities in music and musical practices that helped their ideals take root. That is, beginning with revolutionaries’ debates over music’s value to the state, which set the terms for those of the Third Republic, I explore when, why, and how music came to be part of public policy and people’s public lives in France.

133. Maxime du Camp, *Paris: Ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie* (Paris: Hachette, 1875), 6: 232. In his *Histoire du luxe privé et public depuis l’antiquité jusqu’à nos jours*, 4 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1878), Henri Baudrillart agrees, seeing “the multiplicity of needs as a sign of the superiority of the species” and the races, because needs give rise to effort and thus to corresponding capacities and, through the work involved, to human sociability and society (1: 48–53).