INTRODUCTION

What did it mean to be a philosopher in the Age of Enlightenment? Was the ideal man of letters, as tradition held, a celibate bachelor married to Philosophy? Or was he a man of the world, married, possibly with children? These questions provoked much hand-wringing during the eighteenth century. Men of letters aspired to be sociable and useful but also wanted to safeguard their independence. Would polite socializing help them communicate with each other and accrue new knowledge? What was the value of undisturbed solitude? If marriage was healthier and more socially useful than celibacy, should anyone sign up for a life of sexless bachelorhood? These questions were, in many ways, old ones: similar debates had flared up during the Renaissance and Reformation. But the savants of the French Enlightenment attacked these questions with zeal, and a significant number decided they could best live their intellectual and social ideals by marrying and fathering children. Many founded families, a move that transformed their work in fundamental ways.

Families, both real and metaphoric, occupied considerable real estate in the cultural landscape of eighteenth-century France. Family metaphors constituted the bedrock of political authority, with the king as father of his people. Novels, many of them coated in a thick gloss of family feeling, became wildly popular. Plays dramatized family stories with bold gestures and copious weeping. Treatises proposed new ways to nurture family emotions, seeing the love between husband and wife, mother and child, father and family as key to social reform. A thriving public sphere remained interwoven with more intimate categories. Stories about individual families functioned as metaphors for social corruption and regeneration, while revolutionaries imagined private life as a font of public virtue and patriotism. Families were everywhere in the print culture of the period, and the philosophes of the Enlightenment peddled family feeling with abandon. They authored sentimental texts and wept over novels. Family stories plainly appealed to them.[1]

And yet, for all that historians know about domestic life, for all that scholars have contemplated private life and its public import, few have studied the stories that men of letters told about their own family lives. Why not? The question of married men of letters has attracted little attention from historians in part because they have assumed that conspicuous cases—Rousseau's abandoned children, Voltaire's affairs—speak for all savants. Such examples have encouraged historians to see family life as removed from the work of philosophy. In *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*, for example, Robert Darnton suggests that the true philosophe could only be an unmarried man. A philosophe's marriage signified his domestication, his capitulation to tradition and conformity. Nor is Darnton the only historian to assume that thinkers cared little for marriage. Only a few scholars, such as Anne Vila, have explored questions related to married savants.[2] Biographies abound, and these do examine a thinker's family life in rich detail.[3] Given their focus on one individual, however, biographies are not the best medium for discovering wider trends in Enlightenment culture. When viewed one at a time, married philosophers seem exceptional rather than a part of a larger cultural pattern. And so for most scholars, families have rarely factored into the intellectual histories of the eighteenth century. The myth that family life had little to do with philosophy has persisted.

Sentimental Savants solves this problem of scale by drawing on a number of case studies: the Du Châtelet, Diderot, Helvétius, d'Epinay, Condorcet, Necker, Lavoisier, and Lalande families. I am hardly the first scholar to study the likes of these, but my approach connects these famous individuals to their culture in new ways. By examining savants immersed in a diverse array of fields, from chemistry to pedagogy, agronomy to anatomy, I show that shared cultural practices united them. Rather than separating natural philosophers from novelists, women from men, nobles from bourgeois, I look instead at their common traditions and ideals. This is not to deny that real differences existed between my case studies. The savants studied here had varying levels of wealth and social privilege, and I take care to note the ways in which those circumstances shaped their individual experiences.[4] But despite those differences, many philosophes gravitated toward similar forms of self-representation and intimate empiricism in their correspondence and published work. To further demonstrate the wide appeal of these ideas and practices, I glean evidence from collective sources such as eulogies and biographical compendiums.

Using this mix of sources, I argue that a new intellectual ideal emerged in the eighteenth century. Bachelorhood (if not necessarily celibacy) continued to appeal, but family life also beckoned. How lovely it would be, thought some philosophers, to have a devoted wife and affectionate children. Seduced by visions of domestic bliss and familial collaboration, many men of letters turned away from an ascetic life of bachelorhood and dreamed of other possibilities. A new model captivated them: a brilliant man whose loving wife and devoted children enhanced, rather than distracted from, his intellectual life. Eighteenth-century thinkers had come a long way from the curt dismissal of domesticity issued by the scholastic philosopher Peter Abelard (d. 1142), who had asked: "What could there be in common between scholars and wetnurses, writing desks and cradles, books, writing tablets, and distaffs, pens and spindles?"[5] Rather than defining the life of the mind as a total retreat from domestic life, married Enlightenment philosophers imagined social bonds and family love as nurturing and supporting their work. Portraying themselves as loving husbands and fathers—the very picture of idealized sentimental masculinity—helped thinkers represent themselves as engaged members of society who provided a virtuous example for the public to follow.

These sentimental savants, as I call them, were interested in more than emotional solace. An exciting new array of empirical possibilities called to them. Married philosophes often had children, and those children offered a tantalizing opportunity for savants to practice an intimate form of empiricism. Education, so vital to Enlightenment thought, need not be an abstract exercise; they could try out the latest theories. Likewise, philosophes who advocated smallpox inoculation did not need to confine their enthusiasm to the pages of their pamphlets. They inoculated their children, generating proof for the public that the technique was indeed safe and effective. Philosophes seasoned their publications with references to these private practices, bolstering their intellectual authority and anchoring their ideas in compelling narratives. They invited other parents to follow their example, to see savants as moral exemplars as well as extraordinary intellects. If more and more families made themselves like philosophes' families, they suggested, social reform would take deeper root.

Intellectuals had married and had children before the eighteenth century, but during the age of sentiment, domestic narratives were infused with new importance. Loving family ties were the foundation of natural virtue, sociability, patriotism, and social utility. By emphasizing how devoted they were to their families, men of letters tapped into fashionable ideals of sentimental family life and portrayed themselves as exceptionally good men deserving of public trust and emulation. Did every one of them have the idyllic family life they claimed to have? Probably not, although it is difficult to tell from existing sources. But even if social reality fell short of the sentimental ideal, these savants still participated in a new intellectual practice that encouraged them to wear their hearts on their sleeves and turn up the dial on sentimental affect. That they loved their wives and cared about their children became a part of their public personae. It signaled to the public that these men were trustworthy, sensitive, and useful. Marriage was not something to hide: it was an asset to flaunt. In a world where philosophers competed fiercely for audiences, stipends, and general renown, married men of letters used their domestic experiences to give themselves an edge, to fashion themselves as experts on a host of topics.

Indeed, philosophes had great ambitions and hoped to remake their society. Fairly or not, many Enlightenment thinkers lampooned previous generations of scholars—not to mention their present-day enemies—for being aloof, useless, and focused on silly quibbles.[6] By contrast, they represented themselves as fully engaged with society. That they believed they could and should transform their world is significant in and of itself. Older cosmologies had represented society as divinely ordained or historically determined; past philosophers focused their reforms on reversing decline and returning society to a more perfect order created by God and their ancestors. Eighteenth-century philosophers, however, saw society as man-made, with many believing that human beings themselves were at least partially malleable.[7] Many individuals felt confident in their ability to exact social and political change.

This new understanding of society inflected much Enlightenment thought and encouraged men of letters to use their families as propaganda in their efforts for social reform. The potential implications of domestic experiments were thus far reaching. Because family metaphors informed the way people understood society, reforming the domestic sphere could have implications outside intimate spaces. Savants saw family life as a laboratory in which they could test new ideas *and* as a model of society writ small. Philosophes were not simply proposing new ways of organizing families; they were proposing new ways of organizing society.

Marriage and family life were far from peripheral to the making of knowledge in Enlightenment France. The family lives of eighteenth-century savants belong at the center of the Enlightenment, not in the realm of biographical ephemera, because marriage and family life became important tools for the practice and promotion of ideas. Instead of dismissing wives as silly, stupid, or shrewish, savants celebrated their marriages as loving and productive. In lieu of conceptualizing their studies as something best done alone, savants trained their spouses and offspring to act as their assistants. And instead of treating their intimate lives and intellectual work as wholly distinct, these thinkers transformed their families into the object of their investigations. They turned their children into test subjects for their social and medical theories. For a host of reasons, then, the family was a crucial institution of the Enlightenment. The conspicuous display of family love became a key method by which savants positioned themselves as worthy and virtuous leaders of the public, and the use of the family home as an experimental space provided an important new venue for social and scientific experiments.

Family life was about more than rhetoric, of course, and I also aim to reconstruct the experience of domestic life: who worked with whom, who did what with their children. Or, at least, I reconstruct these domestic scenes as well as the passage of 250 years permits. Like many historians of family life, I often found myself exasperated while conducting my research, wishing that more of my subjects had paused to sit down and record their daily lives in minute detail, with attention to how they felt and why (and, if you please, on thick paper and in beautiful handwriting). But most did not do this on a regular basis, and I could steal only the occasional glance into a drawing room or laboratory. Put together, however, these scenes help construct a more comprehensive look into intellectual family life.

At heart, however, this remains a book about stories: what philosophes told their public about themselves and their families. Savants used personal anecdotes to cultivate favorable reputations and to assure their audience that they had personal experience with matters like education and inoculation. These stories were central to the philosophes' attempt to position themselves as moral leaders and figures worthy of emulation. Eager to attract public attention and have a real-life impact, many thinkers longed to break out of their studies and influence their readers' lives. Stories about families helped them do that. This is not to say that the social reality of family life did not matter—it most certainly did. Whether or not savants truly lived up to the sentimental ideals they espoused, they nevertheless had actual wives and children and so could write about families in concrete fashion. They could unite the language of feeling with a rhetoric of empiricism, a brew that made for a potent blend. Their rhetoric drew strength from the fact that they seemed to be practicing what they preached. The pages that follow are thus not strictly intellectual history, or social history, or cultural history, but a combination thereof. This is a history of eighteenth-century ideas as they intersected with cultural, social, and epistemological practices.

At the same time, basing authority on personal experience and natural virtue helped equalize expertise in eighteenth-century France. Male savants were not alone in their ability to observe their children or write moving stories; women of letters could engage in similar work, and I am interested in their stories as well. Indeed, claims of personal experience were so accessible that they fragmented expertise, especially on controversial topics like inoculation. The story of family life and intellectual authority is not one of straightforward progression or stability. As savants traversed the shifting topography of intellectual ideals, they had to continuously reinforce their personal authority, to tell new stories about family life that would give them the upper hand over their detractors.

Given the previous pages' emphasis on family love as intellectually valuable, it will come as no surprise that I find much fault with labeling the Enlightenment the "Age of Reason." In this, I have good company. Historians and literary scholars have done much to dismantle the narrative of the Enlightenment as an era of rational progress, led by philosophes devoted to reason and reason alone. Scholars no longer see emotions as cordoned off from the Enlightenment. Instead, sentiment was central to the intellectual culture of the eighteenth century, even in scientific fields.[8] The Age of Reason, scholars now argue, was also an age of sensibility: reason and emotion were both critical to the project of enlightenment. Men and women admired reason and emotion in equal turn, and they aspired to live their lives as rational but sensitive individuals; sensibility was a way of life.[9] Diderot and D'Alembert, editors of the grand *Encyclopédie* that sought to model human reason and catalogue all knowledge, both wept over sentimental novels. The title "Age of Reason" only captures part of the Enlightenment.

The term is further problematic in that it suggests a single unified, pan-European Enlightenment. An older historiography of the Enlightenment, exemplified by the works of Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay, defined the movement as a discrete set of ideas and debates. To be an Enlightenment philosophe entailed accepting key dogma. A few historians, such as Jonathan Israel, continue to define the Enlightenment as a kind of catechism, focusing on religious skepticism and radical political philosophies.[10] But most scholars now argue that the Enlightenment lacked stability and only acquired coherence retrospectively, when conservative and radical politicians looked back on eighteenth-century thought to explain the causes of the French Revolution.[11] Enlightenment thinkers advanced many different, sometimes contradictory, ideas. Nor were philosophers united by shared convictions. Some were devoutly religious, some were not, and you can spot similar disjunctures in any area of thought.

In part, the onetime coherence of the Enlightenment has fallen apart because the number of thinkers and modes of intellectual inquiry now associated with it has grown tremendously. Historians once studied a small group of thinkers as *the* Enlightenment, but now a huge number of women, artisans, statesmen, and clerics crowd the stage.[12] Due to this capacious understanding of who counts as an Enlightenment thinker, the movement now looks like a much wider and, correspondingly, looser phenomenon than historians once thought.

When historians pull their focus outward from the most famous philosophes and view the Enlightenment from this wide angle, it becomes impossible to define the movement as a cohesive set of beliefs. Instead, many scholars focus on the development of new cultural and intellectual practices as characteristic features of the Enlightenment. Thinkers espoused many different ideas, but they broadly shared a commitment to public debate and sociability. These practices took many forms: gathering in salons, submitting essays to academic prize contests and newspapers, joining Freemason lodges, planning daily meals, and so forth.[13] Enlightenment actors aspired to find new ways to engage with and reform their society, which spawned new social and cultural practices. Thinkers may not have agreed on their ideas, but they shared new modes of engagement with and for society. Indeed, "the social" is a particularly fruitful concept for the study of eighteenth-century intellectual culture. This angle allows historians to shift from defining "the" Enlightenment to considering how individuals imagined they were *living* the Enlightenment.[14] By focusing on shared practices of self-fashioning and domestic rhetoric, *Sentimental Savants* takes a similar approach.

Focusing on cultural practices has already reaped bountiful returns for studies of the French Revolution. Revolutionaries did not limit themselves to reforming their government but instead conceived of the Revolution as an all-encompassing affair, with total social transformation being their ultimate goal. They tackled subjects as seemingly disparate as fashion and families, religion and political representation, social hierarchy and education.[15] They threw out old ideas of society and embraced the new with much enthusiasm. No aspect of social life stood outside their purview. During the Revolution's most radical phase, political figures even rejected the Gregorian calendar in favor of a secular calendar composed of ten-day weeks. Revolutionaries went beyond Enlightenment conceptions of reform: this was society building on steroids. But it is still useful for scholars to consider the roots of these revolutionary social visions in eighteenth-century culture and to consider how Enlightenment families took their own steps to revamp society.

By focusing on the intersection between the language of feeling and intellectual practice, I also contribute to the burgeoning field of the history of emotions, which traces how the expression and experience of emotions has changed over time. William Reddy has pioneered new understandings of emotions in eighteenth-century France, focusing his efforts on uncovering "emotional regimes" (systems of emotional norms that shore up social hierarchies).[16] Reddy argues that, in the middle of the eighteenth century, elites embraced sentimental outbursts of emotion as they sought to break free from the strictures of court life. My work likewise explores the shift toward sentimentalism as well as its consequences, but in a different setting.

My arguments have also been much informed by the history of science, especially those historians who work on the social construction of intellectual authority. Scientific "truths" did not just spring forth from the heads of lone geniuses nor did those geniuses enjoy automatic support. Rather, their authority—their expertise—had to be socially constructed. They had to represent themselves as using established methods, aligned with accepted theories, affiliated with prestigious institutions, or associated with social elites. To take an English example, when Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes went head to head over the moral and scientific value of constructing an air pump, it helped Boyle's case that he was a gentleman associated with the Royal Academy and that Hobbes was not.[17] Claims to scientific knowledge were not made in a vacuum, so to speak.

By the eighteenth century, emotion had become one of the key characteristics of scientific authority. French savants stressed emotion as the wellspring of knowledge, making sentiment a cornerstone of their credibility. These were no dispassionate observers. Instead, thinkers presented themselves as steeped in emotion, social connections, and empirical knowledge.[18] The modern idea of science as a purely rational, detached exercise was nowhere to be found in early empiricism. Studying philosophes as family men reveals new ways in which eighteenth-century savants constructed their personal authority and developed empirical knowledge. Virtuous social attachments enhanced their credibility and enabled empirical investigations, in an appropriately sentimental fashion.

Writing the history of these families shows that many actors contributed to scientific work, itself a major theme in the history of science. Studying "science" in the early modern period—a time when few people studied nature in a professional capacity and when the term "scientist" had yet to be coined—reveals a veritable chorus of collaborators: artisans, barber surgeons, and jewelers, just to name a few.[19] Women's historians have been especially successful in revealing the hidden labor of individuals inside and outside scientific institutions, work that had been erased from traditional accounts of the early modern period.[20] Women participated in intellectual life in many ways: they were authors trained by their doting fathers, well-heeled gentlewomen who studied botany, patrons of learned individuals, and astronomers who collaborated with their husbands, fathers, and brothers. *Sentimental Savants* is my attempt to dispel the old notion of scientists and philosophers as solitary geniuses whose families had nothing to do with their intellectual success. Wives, daughters, sons, brothers, and sisters all worked together to develop new knowledge. I build on earlier scholarship by exploring new case studies, such as the family of the astronomer Jérôme Lalande.

But I am also interested in pushing the scholarly conversation about the domestic context of science in new directions by focusing on reputation. The family functioned as a self-fashioning tool for men and women. Female associates cropped up in correspondence, were acknowledged in the prefaces to published works, and were featured in works of art as loving and learned collaborators. Men, too, draped themselves in a mantle of family love as a part of their public self-fashioning. *Sentimental Savants* not only reveals the work done by family members but also explores new methods of asserting intellectual authority, new public roles for philosophers, and the use of the domestic sphere as a testing ground for larger social reforms. In studying the family as a creative space for making knowledge and building reputations, I am not claiming that family life was entirely beneficial for all family members all the time. The relative benefits of intellectual households were especially complicated for women. Family life opened certain doors for female savants and afforded them recognition for their work. But it also imposed limitations. In most cases, women worked in relation to a male family member and did not pursue autonomous careers. They did not determine their own schedules or set their own agendas. Accordingly, some scholars suggest that the limitations of family workshops for women may have slowed the rise of women working as scientists in their own right. Intellectual households did indeed have their constraints and they generally failed to help women develop independent careers, but they also introduced more women to scientific study and made their involvement visible to savants in the Republic of Letters. By discussing these opportunities, I am not dismissing feminist critiques of scholarly households. Family life was not always good for women, but it was not wholly bad either.

In my focus on family as a testing ground and a site for self-fashioning, I join those scholars who show that many intellectuals developed ideas and staged their personae in the domestic sphere. Sarah Ross's study of Renaissance women, Paul White's work on Darwin, Deborah Coen's study of the Exner family, and John Randolph's research on the Bakunin family all explore different contexts, and yet together reveal that families contributed to the production of knowledge in varied ways.[21] These studies show we cannot assume that neat barriers divided public from private. Instead, the public was invited to peek into the windows of the family home, to admire the ties that bound family members, and to emulate the conduct and methods of learned families. Enlightenment France has not yet been a big part of the history of intellectual households and scientific reputations, but the eighteenth century—an age of sentiment, and a period when public and private intersected in powerful ways—was a key phase of this history.[22]

Some of these works—Coen's, White's, and Randolph's—focus on a single family. I have chosen to follow a different model, however, more akin to Sarah Ross's "experiment in collective biography," by studying a range of eighteenth-century thinkers from a variety of social milieux. Although the *gens de lettres* studied here hailed from different backgrounds, they were not unconnected. Many of them knew each other: some belonged to the same academy, others socialized together at salons, and many had mutual acquaintances. They belonged to the same "emotional community," a group of people bound together by shared texts, traditions, or living spaces that have a common "system of feeling."[23] They read many of the same works, they adhered to many of the same ideals, and they practiced similar emotional styles. They shared a common intellectual culture and engaged in similar forms of intellectual exchange, even if the content of their ideas varied.

Yet the savants discussed in the following chapters represent a wide range of intellectual and cultural activities, and the study of so mixed a group poses a few problems. The savants studied here are sufficiently diverse to resist many of the traditional titles applied to Enlightenment thinkers. The term "philosophe" does not fit all my case studies, as it referred to a particular set of thinkers associated with Voltaire or the *En-*

cyclopédie. I more often use inclusive titles such as *gens de lettres* and "savants" while restricting the term "philosophe" for those associated with that *parti*, such as Diderot and D'Alembert. *Gens de lettres* (or, in its masculine version, "men of letters") and "savants" refer more generally to those engaged in intellectual work, and are more universally applicable to the subjects studied here. All these terms were contested and ever-shifting in their meaning. Rather than using labels to draw boundaries between thinkers, I employ "savants" and *gens de lettres* to suggest people who self-identified as engaging in "enlightenment," whatever that meant for them.

The families considered in this book make for a varied group, but they are unified in one respect: they are all French. In studying the Enlightenment in France, however, I am not claiming that the Enlightenment was essentially French. Work on the Enlightenment in European, American, and global contexts makes clear that it was not.[24] Nor am I arguing that well-known philosophes like Diderot and savants like Lavoisier are more worthy of study than lesser-known individuals. Mine is just one context of many. I hope that scholars will pick up this project in other milieux to develop a fuller understanding of intellectual families.

Also worthy of future research are nonbiological families. An enormous variety of intellectual households proliferated in eighteenth-century France. I have chosen to focus on biological families united by marriage because that was the household that prompted the most discussion: the most anxiety among those who worried about philosophers compromising their impartiality, the most praise among those who saw marriage and fatherhood as a man's natural obligations. Few philosophers warned against the dangers of a teacher treating his students like his sons; they worried far more about the financial burden and everyday distractions of small children. Likewise, same-sex households—with two male philosophers sharing one roof—prompted little anxiety. Male friendship of this sort was highly praised. Other philosophers, like D'Alembert, lived with women who were not their wives. Focusing on debates about marriage and biological fatherhood is not an attempt to privilege heteronormative families over other household arrangements. There is still much to study with regard to savants and their households; I have only covered some of the terrain here.

The book begins with debates about philosophers marrying and having children: Would family life make them better or worse philosophers? More useful to society or useless as thinkers? I then explore how family life and sentimental self-fashioning shaped the making of Enlightenment knowledge: how wives and children collaborated with savants to observe, calculate, and promote new works; how the family became a laboratory for testing and advertising ideas about education and inoculation. These chapters look at flash points in the history of intellectual family life, with each spanning the eighteenth century; many events discussed in separate chapters unfolded around the same time. Together, these chapters reveal family life as the stage on which savants played their parts.

Philosophes' families were *sui generis* in many ways, but in revealing new links between public and private, emotional and intellectual life, they have a broad historical significance. They remind us that the Enlightenment was a complex blend of ideas for reform and renewal. Eighteenth-century individuals did not want sterile debates. They wanted to imagine new ways to live, new ways to build society. This desire to live the Enlightenment did not stop at the family doorstep. Rather, the family home was fertile ground for developing new ideas, new social theories, and new cultural practices. Families—husbands, wives, daughters, and sons—were key players during the Enlightenment. Men and women aspired to represent their families as loving, learned, and respectable. By drawing attention to the ordinary virtues of private life, they opened up debates about the relevance of personal virtue to public authority. Those debates reverberate still today.