From Perfectibility to Progress:

The Search for a Science of Society in France, 1750-1850

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I declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of History at the Australian National University, is wholly my own original work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged and has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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À la mémoire d'Émile Perreau-Saussine

Abstract

The early nineteenth century was a defining moment in the emergence of new, future-oriented visions of human progress. This thesis analyses this development of modern thought through a particular case study: the search for a science of society in France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Through a contextual study of ideas and knowledge production, the chapters examine the successive models of reform and regeneration that defined this search, tracking a shift in the way these models were conceptualised. This shift involved a transition from individual to collective models of improvement, or, more discursively, from perfectibility to progress.

This thesis documents this shift by tracing the origins and development of early French social science in the works of Sieyès, Condorcet and the Idéologues, before turning to the reconfiguration of this science effected by Saint-Simon and his followers in the nineteenth century. In doing so, this study provides new insights into the search for a science of society during and after the French Revolution, a revised interpretation of the history of the concept of perfectibility and a fresh perspective on the ongoing contest between science, religion and politics in this period of intense upheaval. It also advances scholarly understanding of the range of moral, philosophical and natural scientific ideas behind early French positivism and socialism. The nineteenth-century fascination, if not obsession, with progress is shown, in this thesis, to have been shaped by the works of theorists with visionary and idiosyncratic imaginations.

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Introduction

The idea of progress was, for a long time, central to discussions about human society and to the range of expectations people held about the future. In science, politics and culture, this idea was used to promote an array of ever-shifting developments, and it played an important role in justifying those developments to sceptics, conservatives and those who, for whatever reason, did not see the advantages of perpetually changing norms, institutions and practices. The rallying cry of the self-proclaimed moderns, the idea of progress rose to prominence at the same time as the historical consciousness that swept through Europe, and beyond, in the early nineteenth century. As historians have shown, this period was crucial in the emergence of a new sense of time. The French Revolution, which impacted the lives of millions, introduced a break in historical continuity, and it contributed to hitherto unimagined conceptions of the future. This consciousness was defined, as Reinhart Koselleck has theorised, by a perception of acceleration and the widening gap, and tension, between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. If this gap was a source of melancholy to some, others took it as an invitation to articulate fresh and original visions of social improvement.[1]

The rise of this new orientation towards the future was not lost on contemporaries. In the early 1850s, Louis-Auguste Javary, a philosophy professor in the provincial city of Orléans, announced that every century had its character and that the nineteenth century was defined by "the idea of progress," which he described as the "general law of history and of the future of humanity." According to Javary, this idea was now widely diffused and, though it was sometimes refuted, few in contemporary society were unfamiliar with it.[2] Around the same time across the Atlantic Ocean, the Unitarian minister Orville Dewer announced that the meaning of progress

[1] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). See also François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
[2] Louis-Auguste Javary, *L'idée de progrès* (Paris, 1851), 1. (All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.)

was a "matter of controversy" that was "rife and raging through the whole sphere of civilization – from the farthest bounds of Europe, from the Bosphorus and the Black Sea, across the whole world, to the coasts of Oregon and California."[3] Back in France, the socialist thinker Philippe Buchez suggested that the idea of progress had become the foundation for a new science in which a linear understanding of history had replaced cyclical conceptions of time.[4] To all three, there was something novel about this idea, and, though it may have been a source of dispute, it was also epoch-defining.

This thesis sheds light on these contested attitudes to time and social change through the lens of a particular case study: the search for a science of society in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century France. This search was shaped by different models of improvement, and it gave rise to new, future-oriented philosophies of progress in the 1800s. The project of a science of society, or *science sociale*, first appeared in France in the second half of the eighteenth century, and it originated in Enlightenment-era attempts to regenerate European monarchies, further peace and prosperity, and find a way out of recurrent patterns of crisis. This project became a source of debate and discussion during the French Revolution, when reformers sought to do away with the institutions of the *ancien régime* and reconstitute political society on new principles of liberty and equality. In the aftermath of the Revolution, this project was then reconceptualised around notions of social hierarchy, scientific leadership and religiously inspired conceptions of moral cohesion. This paved the way for the emergence of the related, but distinct strands of thought known as positivism and socialism, each of which had long and varied legacies in France and elsewhere.

[3] Rev. Orville Dewer, *The Laws of Human Progress and Modern Reforms: A Lecture Delivered before the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New York* (New York, 1852).
[4] Philippe Buchez, "Progrès," in *Encyclopédie du dix-neuvième siècle. Répertoire universel des sciences, des lettres et des arts avec la biographie de tous les hommes célèbres* (Paris, 1852), 20:480.

The argument of this thesis is that there was a shift in the models that underpinned the search for a science of society in this period. To put it succinctly, there was a transition from individual to collective models of improvement, or, more discursively, from perfectibility to progress. In the late eighteenth century, the project of a science of society was usually predicated on an analysis of the faculties of individual mind and body and of the types of behaviour, whether innate or acquired, that individuals pursued. This project was closely connected to the concept of perfectibility, conceived as the human ability for moral, intellectual and, sometimes, physical betterment. Although they were not unconcerned with broader patterns of progress, theorists at this time tended to emphasise the potential for improvement of human capacities through education, or suggest proposals for social and political reform based on an analysis of individual needs and interests. This type of approach was popularised in the early years of the Revolution by the mathematician turned revolutionary Nicolas de Condorcet and the pamphleteer Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, and it shaped the perspective of the group of reformers known as the Idéologues after the Terror.

The failure to stabilise French society in the 1790s contributed to a move away from individual models of improvement. Drawing on the views of counter-revolutionary critics, theorists in the early nineteenth century came to give greater emphasis to the collective levers of progress, such as the development of the overall system of knowledge, the cohesion and coordination of economic activities or the moral doctrine unifying beliefs and values in society. This approach was spearheaded by Henri Saint-Simon, the idiosyncratic but visionary thinker whose approach inspired the positivist philosopher Auguste Comte and also contributed to the emergence of early socialist thought in France. While he recognised, and at times promoted, the capacity for individual improvement, Saint-Simon repudiated the concept of perfectibility and he put forward visions of progress based on evolutionary principles, a linear and deterministic conception of history and a putatively providential law of human "civilisation." This more collective approach,

and that of Saint-Simon's followers, did not represent an epistemic break, however, and it built in a number of ways on earlier versions of social science. This thesis investigates these changes and continuities and, in doing so, illuminates the intellectual origins of an age fascinated, if not obsessed, with progress.

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The history of the idea of the progress has been the subject of a wealth of detailed, erudite studies. A range of scholars have traced the development of this idea from time immemorial, while others have focused on the eighteenth century, and France in particular, when ideas of human improvement first started to be divorced from Christian eschatology. Classic studies, such as those of J. B. Bury and John Passmore, explored the notion of progress and its correlates (perfection, perfectibility, civilisation) by examining their successive iterations in the works of ancient, medieval and modern writers.[5] On the whole, these studies followed the classic approach to the history of ideas, as theorised by Arthur O. Lovejoy. Following this approach, intellectual history involved the study of unit-ideas, and their different uses and manifestations in past philosophical works. Histories in this mould tended to provide broad-brush accounts of those ideas, however, and they did not necessarily do justice to the traditions of thought or social settings in which particular arguments were developed.[6] The works of Bury, Passmore and others thus sometimes sacrificed depth for breadth and, despite their merits, overlooked some of the crucial conceptual innovations in the history of ideas of progress.

[5] J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth* (London: Macmillan, 1920); John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1970). See also Georges Sorel, *Les illusions du progrès* (Paris: M. Rivière, 1908); Jules Delvaille, *Essai sur l'histoire de l'idée de progrès jusqu'à la fin du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1910); Morris Ginsberg, *The Idea of Progress: A Revaluation* (London: Methuen, 1953); Charles L. Van Doren, *The Idea of Progress* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1967); Charles Frankel, *The Faith of Reason: The Idea of Progress in the French Enlightenment* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969); Sydney Pollard, *The Idea of Progress: History and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971); Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

[6] On this approach and its legacy, see Anthony Grafton, "The History of Ideas: Precept and Practice, 1950-2000 and Beyond," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 1 (Jan., 2006): 1-32.

This study draws on a more contextualist tradition of historical interpretation. It examines different ideas of human improvement by identifying the social and political settings in which these ideas were articulated, the various lines of arguments that they drew on and the textual sources in which they appeared.[7] By trying to avoid pre-conceived notions of the meaning and implications of those ideas, this method of intellectual history allows for a more fine-tuned understanding of past strands of thought and it helps to explain why those might have enjoyed traction in previous times. It may even open new vistas onto our own mental world.[8] This thesis also builds on recent interest in the history of knowledge, an approach that eschews traditional distinctions between scientific and non-scientific forms of understanding and encourages analysis of traditionally marginalised topics and theorists.[9] This approach is particularly suited to the study of early French social science. A wide range of thinkers were involved in the search for a science of society in the period 1750-1850, a time before the consolidation of modern scientific disciplines, and they drew on a variety of sources – historical, philosophical and metaphysical – in pursuing this quest.

As a contextual study of ideas and knowledge production, this thesis contributes to two broad fields of historiography. The first encompasses the history of ideas of progress and perfectibility in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras. Revising classic accounts, recent studies have highlighted the range of debates and arguments that those ideas generated, following the shift in attitudes to history, knowledge and society that took place in early eighteenth-century

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[7] Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," in *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57-89; Richard Whatmore, "Quentin Skinner and the Relevance of Intellectual History," in *A Companion to Intellectual History*, eds. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 97-112. I also draw on Adrian Blau, "Textual Context in the History of Political Thought and Intellectual History," *History of European Ideas* 45, no. 8 (2019): 1191-210; "Extended Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 58, no. 3 (September 2019): 342-59.

[8] Richard Whatmore, *What is Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 5; Annabel Brett, "What is Intellectual History Now?" in *What is History Now?* ed. David Cannadine (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 128.

[9] For a recent overview, see Helge Jordheim and David Gary Shaw, "Opening Doors: A Turn to Knowledge," *History and Theory* 59, no. 4 (December 2020): 3-18. More generally, see Peter Burke, *What Is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016); Lorraine Daston, "The History of Science and the History of Knowledge," *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (2017): 131-54.

Europe.[10] Scholars have notably emphasised the historical significance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's coining of the term *perfectibilité* in 1755, arguing that it was the starting-point for a set of discussions about human improvement that carried over until the early 1800s.[11] The turn of the nineteenth century has also been identified as a critical juncture in changing ideas of progress and in the shift away from the projects of reform and regeneration of the French Revolution.[12] The rise of evolutionary theories of natural history, finally, has been shown to have provided new ways of thinking about the future, inspiring the visions of progress of a range of theorists in the nineteenth century, and beyond.[13] This thesis builds on these studies, but it further advances scholarly understanding in this field in several ways.

Firstly, this study provides a new interpretation of the history of the concept of perfectibility in the eighteenth century. Although he introduced the term, Rousseau was notoriously despondent about the potential for improvement in his time, and the reconfiguration of his concept into a beneficent attribute of human nature has long been a historical puzzle. I argue that this concept was redefined after Rousseau, and often in response to him, on the basis of principles of sensationist psychology and of the branch of thought known as the "science of man."[14] Following these approaches, individual thought, behaviour and corporeal development were

[10] On this shift, see Dan Edelstein, *The Enlighenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010).
[11] Florence Lotterie, *Progrès et perfectibilité: un dilemme des Lumières françaises (1755-1814)* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015); *L'homme perfectible*, ed. Bertrand Binoche (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2004). See also Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Michael Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes: An Eighteenth-Century Emblem in the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[12] Nicholas Le Dévédec, "La société de l'amélioration: Le renversement de la perfectibilité humaine, de l'humanisme des Lumières à l'humain augmenté" (PhD diss., Université de Montréal and Université de Rennes 1, 2013). Other recent studies of ideas of progress and perfectibility in this period include Michael E. Winston, *From Perfectibility to Perversion: Meliorism in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); William Max Nelson, *The Time of Enlightenment: Constructing the Future in France, 1750 to Year One* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).
[13] Peter J. Bowler, *Progress Unchained: Ideas of Evolution, Human History and the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). See also Michael Ruse, *Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
[14] On eighteenth-century sensationism and the science of man, see Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Elizabeth A. Williams, *The Physical and the Moral: Anthropology, Physiology, and Philosophical Medicine in France, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

understood as shaped, and sometimes determined, by physical sensibility, and it thus became possible to conjecture that humans were endowed with an in-built capacity to perfect their knowledge and conduct and, potentially too, their bodies. This study suggests that a crucial conceptual move was made by the Enlightenment philosopher Claude-Adrien Helvétius, who presented perfectibility as an attribute of the human mind and associated it with the equal ability for learning of both men and women. This redefinition, I argue, supplied part of the framework that inspired Condorcet's influential conception of perfectibility as an indefinite capacity for moral and intellectual improvement.

This thesis also builds on the distinction, recently proposed by Michael Sonenscher, between a conception of perfectibility oriented towards the convergence of human capacities and another oriented towards their divergence.[15] Sonenscher employs this distinction to differentiate between Condorcet's approach and that of the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel. In this study, this distinction supplies a broader matrix for distinguishing between eighteenth-century conceptions of perfectibility from those of Helvétius and his contemporaries, the *philosophes* Paul-Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach and Denis Diderot, to those of Sieyès and Condorcet. Sonenscher's distinction is also revised to illuminate the difference between the start and end points of human perfectibility and, on this basis, this study presents an original interpretation of the thought of the two leading Idéologues, the philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy, who coined the term *idéologie*, and the medical theorist Pierre Cabanis. In developing this analysis and mapping out the wider distinctions between different understandings of perfectibility, this thesis provides a fresh perspective on the moral and intellectual purchase of this concept, the relationship between its different iterations and their legacies.

[15] Michael Sonenscher, "Sociability, Perfectibility and the Intellectual Legacy of Rousseau," *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 5 (2015): 683-98.

This study, lastly, brings to light the varied uses of ideas of natural evolution in the search for a science of society in France. Evolutionary theories of natural history, as is well known, emerged out of interest in living organisms' capacity for change, in the origins and development of different species and in the relations between species that those processes generated. Those theories informed the philosophy of progress developed by Saint-Simon in the early nineteenth century – and later built on by Comte – and they were employed to justify the leadership of the *savants* in society, along with the racial and civilisational superiority of Europeans. In a later debate during the July Monarchy, the socialist thinkers Pierre Leroux and Philippe Buchez also respectively appealed to evolutionary and "fixist" theories of natural science to support their visions of social and political reform. This thesis shows that this hitherto unexplored debate shaped elaborate cosmologies of progress that looked to the moral harmony of European, if not global, society. These cosmologies, it is argued, reveal both the philosophical expansiveness and the passion for progress that underpinned socialist models of improvement in the lead up to the revolutions of 1848.

This thesis also contributes to the field of scholarship concerned with early French social science. Historians have long been aware that the project of a science of society grew out of eighteenth-century efforts to stabilise the European state system, and that it was shaped by the group of reformers known as the Physiocrats. A series of studies have examined this project during the French Revolution, while others have traced its reconfiguration into the discipline of sociology and the process of secularisation that is taken to have characterised this development.[16]

[16] Keith Baker, "The Early History of the Term 'Social Science,'" *Annals of Science* 20, no. 3 (1964): 211-26; Brian W. Head, "The Origins of "La Science Sociale" in France, 1770-1800," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 19, no. 2 (1982): 115-32; Keith Margerison, "The Legacy of Social Science: Condorcet, Roederer and the Constitution of the Year VIII," in *Condorcet Studies II*, ed. David Williams (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 13-30; Dominique Damamme, "Entre science et politique, la première science sociale," *Politix* 8, no. 29 (1995): 5-30; Michael Sonenscher, "Ideology, Social Science and General Facts in Late Eighteenth-Century French Political Thought," *History of European Ideas* 35, no. 1 (2009): 24-37. For the more disciplinary histories, see Johan Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory*, transl. Sheila Gogol (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); *French Sociology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); *The Rise of the Social Sciences and the Formation of Modernity: Conceptual Change in Context, 1750-1850*, eds. Johan Heilbron, Lars Magnusson and Björn Wittrock (Dordrecht: Springer, 1998).

Like the history of ideas of progress, the early nineteenth century is seen as a decisive moment in changing conceptions of social science. Scholars have nonetheless described this turning point in different ways. To some, it was defined by the transition from a theory of humans as equal in nature, and hence in rights, to a view of individuals as essentially unequal and of society as needing to be organised around functional differentiation and hierarchy.[17] For others, this shift was marked by a growing distrust in politics and the move towards more technocratic approaches, divorced from ideas of rights and paving the way for deterministic conceptions of social organisation.[18]

This study proposes significant revisions to these interpretations. In the first instance, I show that the term *science sociale* first appeared in print in 1767 in a work by Victor Riquetti, marquis de Mirabeau, not, as historians have until now believed, in 1789 in a pamphlet by Sieyès.[19] Mirabeau was a follower of François Quesnay, the physician who inspired the development of the project of reform that would come to be called "physiocracy." Although Mirabeau used the term just once, this discovery lends weight to the significance of the Physiocrats in the history of early social science. It also underscores the limitations of interpreting this history as a process of

[17] Frank E. Manuel, "From Equality to Organicism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 1 (Jan. 1956): 54-69; "Taming the Future: The French Idea of Perfectibility," in *Shapes of Philosophical History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), 92-114; *The Prophets of Paris: Turgot, Condorcet, Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Comte* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Keith Baker, "Closing the French Revolution: Saint-Simon and Comte," in *The Transformation of Political Culture 1789-1848*, eds. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Oxford: Pergamon, 1989), 323-39. See also Claude Blanckaert, *La nature de la société. Organicisme et sciences sociales au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004); Vincent Bourdeau, "Nature et pensée sociale au XIX^e siècle. Enjeux politiques de l'organicisme," in *La nature du socialisme. Pensée sociale et conceptions de la nature au XIX^e siècle*, eds. Vincent Bourdeau and Arnaud Macé (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2017), 63-89.

[18] Cheryl B. Welch, "Social Science from the French Revolution to Positivism," *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds. Gareth Stedman-Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 171-99; *Liberty and Utility: The French Idéologues and the Transformation of Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Robert Wokler, "Ideology and the Origins of Social Science," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 688-710. See also Thomas E. Kaiser, "The Idéologues: From Enlightenment to Positivism" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1976); Robert Wokler, "Saint-Simon and the Passage from Political to Social Science," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 325-38; Antoine Picon, "Utopian Socialism and Social Science," in *Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 7, *The Modern Social Sciences*, eds. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71-82.

[19] Victor Riquetti, marquis de Mirabeau, "La dépravation de l'ordre légal. Seconde lettre," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 10 (1767): 63.

secularisation. It is well established that the Physiocrats drew on theological arguments in pursuing their project of reform and that they sought to return society to divinely sourced principles of prosperity and harmony.[20] This thesis follows this line of interpretation. It also gathers further evidence to show that, while thinkers like Condorcet and the Idéologues were virulent critics of the Church, there was renewed interest in finding religious solutions to social stability and cohesion in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Building on scholarly work on the Christian origins of socialism, this thesis documents the ongoing and contested relationship between science, religion and politics in the search for a science of society in France.[21]

By focusing on the transition from individual to collective models of improvement, rather than from equality to organicism, this study also reframes our understanding of the conceptual transition that took place in early French social science. Some of the eighteenth-century thinkers examined in this thesis conceived of humans as naturally equal; others did not. Likewise, a range of nineteenth-century theorists emphasised individual difference, while others stressed the equality of capacities, either innate or as a potential. This thesis shows that those positions cut across different models of improvement in 1750-1850 and that there was no uniform relationship between natural origins and social ends in this period. It also highlights the role of ideas of physiology and medicine in shaping understandings of human variability, and it brings to light their different uses and applications. Cabanis, for example, considered that the close interrelationship between mind and body supposed by vitalist medicine made it possible to equalise individual capacities to a certain extent through hygienic reform. Also medically trained,

[20] Michael Sonenscher, "Physiocracy as Theodicy," *History of Political Thought* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 326-39.
[21] Gareth Stedman-Jones, "Religion and the Origins of Socialism," in *Religion and the Political Imagination*, eds. Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 171-89; Carolina Armenteros, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and His Heirs* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Loïc Rignol, *Les hiéroglyphes de la nature. Le socialisme scientifique en France dans le premier XIX^e siècle* (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2014). See also Donald G. Charlton, *Secular Religions in France, 1815-1870* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Paul Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes: Doctrines de l'âge romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); Frank P. Bowman, *Le Christ des barricades (1789-1848)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987); Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830-1852* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Buchez, in contrast, presented social physiology as the underpinning of a new system of moral and intellectual cohesion centred on the "cult" of science and industry.

This thesis, furthermore, proposes a revised interpretation of Saint-Simon's social science. Saint-Simon is often presented as the archetypical theorist of the organic social order, or of a society structured by a hierarchy of functions, the division of tasks and the submission of the parts to the interests of the whole.[22] The recent publication of his complete works allows for a more nuanced reading his thought. This study argues that Saint-Simon developed two distinct models of social improvement in his works. The first looked to the replacement of the Catholic clergy in Europe by the scientific class and of the Christian belief-system by "physicism," a doctrine based on the principle of universal gravitation. Saint-Simon revised his approach after 1814, under the Restoration, and he promoted the emergence of what he called the "industrial and scientific system." On one interpretation, this system would be organised around new forms of functional differentiation and hierarchy; on another, it would see the levelling of economic conditions and the universal solidarity of mankind. This thesis suggests that the former model would inspire Comte's social philosophy, while the latter would supply part of the conceptual foundations of early socialist thought in France.

Studies of early French social science often close with Comte and present the rise of positivism and the introduction of the concept of sociology as endpoints in the search for a science of society.[23] With a broader scope and a wider cast, this thesis suggests a different account of this search. It brings to light that Comte was only one of several of Saint-Simon's followers to attempt to construct a positivist social science in the 1820s, and it details the different theories – including some never before examined – that those thinkers developed. This study also shows that, though Saint-Simon and Comte were staunch critics of revolutionary ideals of individual

[22] For this interpretation, see, among others, Baker, "Closing the French Revolution."
[23] See, for example, Heilbron, *Rise of Social Theory*.

rights and equality, those ideals were resurrected by several of Saint-Simon's heirs under the July Monarchy. Unlike eighteenth-century theorists, however, these thinkers typically conceived of those ideals as the culmination of the spiritual history of European society. If someone like Condorcet conceived of rights as a means of furthering individual independence and the rational emancipation of minds, early socialists such as Buchez and Leroux associated them with the development of new religious doctrines based on principles of association and religious devotion.

This study thus revises established histories of both ideas of perfectibility and progress, as well as of the search for a science of society in France. It does so by examining a series of debates and polemics between thinkers, nearly all men, who were members of the social and intellectual elite of their time. The privileged position of these thinkers undoubtedly shaped, if not limited, their perspectives. It also contributed to the development of social philosophies that were often as theoretically sophisticated as they were divorced from the range of opinions and beliefs of the wider populace. The French Revolution nonetheless sparked the diffusion of many of the powerful ideas at the heart of those philosophies, and it confronted received understandings of social order, political authority and both public and private morality.[24] Increasing literacy, innovations in printing technology and the growth of the urban population in early nineteenth-century France also contributed to the wider reception of political and philosophical works, the rise of the newspaper press and new forms of sociability between workers.[25] Despite their social positions, the thinkers examined in this thesis played an important role in shaping popular understandings of society and politics in their time, and their ideas were instrumental in the dissemination of new models of improvement in the nineteenth century.

[24] Peter McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789-99* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
[25] Martyn Lyons, *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France: Workers, Women, Peasants* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

This study explores a strand of discussion and argument that took place primarily in French and, in large part, in and around Paris. Although the search for a science of society in France was informed by ideas beyond national borders, there was a cultural specificity to this search. This was partly the product of the linguistic particularity of the terms and concepts that were employed as well as the range of lexical innovations that this search engendered (these included the terms *science sociale*, *idéologie*, *positivisme*, *sociologie*, *individualisme* and *socialisme*). It also reflected the intensity of political upheavals in France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period that saw the abolition of the monarchy and of noble titles, then their reinstatement, a set of lengthy, protracted wars and the serial rerun of revolution. These events took place against a background of slow but steady industrialisation, pauperisation and growing urban discontent.[26] If there was ever a time and a place in which political modernity was forged, as a mode of life shaped by the struggle between the past and the future, or between tradition and progress, it was Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century. The intellectual history outlined in this thesis is therefore not a global intellectual history, but it is one with arguably global implications.[27]

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This thesis is organised into five chapters, which are structured chronologically and thematically. The first chapter explores the intellectual origins of the search for a science of society in France and of the models of improvement that shaped this quest in the second half of the eighteenth century. Through a close reading of Rousseau's concept of perfectibility, I relate this to the broader critique of modern society Rousseau developed in his works as well as to his attempt to

[26] For the canonical study of early nineteenth-century pauperisation, see Eugène Buret, *De la misère des classes laborieuses en Angleterre et en France*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1840).
[27] On debate around the possibility of a global intellectual history, see *Global Intellectual History*, eds. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Global Intellectual History Beyond Hegel and Marx," *History and Theory* 54, no. 1 (February 2015): 126-37; Knud Haakonssen and Richard Whatmore, "Global Possibilities in Intellectual History: A Note on Practice," *Global Intellectual History* 2, no. 1 (2017): 18-29; J. G. A. Pocock, "On the Unglobality of Contexts: Cambridge Methods and the History of Political Thought," *Global Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1-14.

provide an alternative. The chapter then turns to the ideas of Quesnay and his followers, the Physiocrats, who first popularised the notion of a science of society. It shows that, while the Physiocrats developed a project of reform centred on changes to economic, fiscal and legal arrangements, Quesnay's approach built on his particular theory of individual cognition. This chapter also underlines the divergent models of improvement put forward by Quesnay's followers in the 1760s and 1770s: while some emphasised the recovery of a natural social order and the return of human minds to simple notions, others stressed the diffusion of knowledge in society and, by implication, the potential for and necessity of human perfectibility.

The last section of chapter one investigates the reconfiguration of the concept of perfectibility and of physiocratic social science in the works of Helvétius and d'Holbach. It shows the ways in which Rousseau's concept was redefined by Helvétius, on the basis of sensationist principles, and it outlines the models of human improvement articulated by Helvétius and d'Holbach in their writings. In contradistinction to a recent strand of scholarship, which sees these thinkers as part of a common vanguard of radical thought, I underline the discrete and alternative models these two thinkers put forward. While they both rejected notions derived from Christian theology, I argue that Helvétius conceived of collective happiness as a condition of the convergence of minds around uniform principles of morality, while d'Holbach emphasised the social benefits of human variation and natural inequality. Neither theorist, I contend, was a proponent of political revolution, but they supplied conceptual resources that would inform the social and political ideas of later revolutionary thinkers. They did so because they gestured towards the possibility of a science of society without physiocracy and, more controversially, of a society without Christianity.

Chapter two examines the moral and political thought of Sieyès and Condorcet. Although these two theorists were political allies during the French Revolution, this chapter shows that they conceived of society and politics differently. Building on Michael Sonenscher's analysis of early

French social science, I argue that it was not only Rousseau but also his critics who played a crucial role in shaping this project. I do so by juxtaposing Sieyès and Condorcet's understandings of political legitimacy to an earlier disagreement between Rousseau and Diderot on the concept of the general will. I then examine their social scientific projects in turn. By surveying his extensive manuscript archive, this chapter argues that Sieyès developed a "science of the social order" on the back of a metaphysics of the self that combined sensationist psychology and the philosophy of Leibniz. This chapter also shows that his model of improvement centred on the possibility of harmonising individual interests and desires in society through the mechanism of the division of labour. Finally, it demonstrates that the proposals for constitutional reform that Sieyès put forward, under the institutional ideal of the "representative system," were an attempt to extend this mechanism to the realm of government.

Turning to Condorcet, in section three of this chapter, I reconstruct the alternative model of improvement behind his project for a "social mathematics." I argue that this model was based on an original conception of perfectibility, and that it rested on a synthesis of naturalistic and providential understandings of human betterment. Through an examination of his educational writings, this chapter shows that the diffusion of knowledge was the key to furthering human happiness and liberty, for Condorcet, but that his approach was caught between democratic and elitist conceptions of reform. This chapter also contends that Condorcet's social mathematics was the inspiration behind the famous tenth chapter of his masterwork, the *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795), in which he outlined his hopes and expectations about the future. It argues that the model of improvement he developed in this work was oriented towards the revival of the simple sentiments of morality individuals acquired within the family, as well as towards the equality of men and women. While Sieyès' model promoted the social harmonisation of human divergence, I suggest, Condorcet's looked to the universal convergence of minds and moral sentiments.

Chapter three tracks the development of these approaches by investigating the social scientific projects of the Idéologues Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis. Although these theorists shared a common political and intellectual outlook, this chapter reveals that they put forward different models of human improvement after the Terror. Destutt de Tracy, I argue, developed a conception of perfectibility that looked to the cultivation of good judgment, based on an analysis of the uniform faculties of the individual mind. For Destutt de Tracy, reformers nonetheless had to employ two ways of promoting good judgement in society: one, for the social and intellectual elite, through education and enlightenment; the other, for the wider population, through the application of the system of laws. Building on principles of vitalist physiology, Cabanis, in contrast, stressed the variability of individual faculties and abilities, but he also promoted the potential for convergence of individual capacities. This chapter shows that these two theorists developed different versions of *idéologie*, which adapted the approaches of their intellectual predecessors, and that these paved the way for ongoing differences of position in the search for a science of society in France.

Chapter four documents the shift from individual to collective models of improvement by examining Saint-Simon's visions of progress. Drawing on Saint-Simon's recently published complete works, I suggest that that the philosopher put forward two distinct models of social improvement in his works. In his early writings, Saint-Simon revived a cyclical theory of progress and decline. I examine this theory by following his critique of Condorcet's conception of perfectibility, and show that it combined concepts derived from the Idéologues and their critics, the group of counter-revolutionary theorists known as the Theocrats. The chapter then moves on to his later model, and it suggests that Saint-Simon articulated a vision of progress under the Restoration predicated on the continuous and irreversible law of "civilisation." I analyse this vision, along with the concept of civilisation on which it was based, by exploring the ways in which it revised the aetiology of the Theocrat Joseph de Maistre, contemporary ideas of political

economy and liberal theories of progress. The last part of this chapter explores the dispute that broke out between Saint-Simon and Comte in the early 1820s, and it explores the ways in which this dispute repeated, in a new form, earlier divisions in the search for a science of society.

The fifth and final chapter traces the legacies of Saint-Simon's ideas of progress in the first half of the nineteenth century by examining two sets of debates between his followers. The first, in the mid-1820s, centred on the proper principles of a "positive" social science. By detailing the arguments of Comte and other thinkers, I show that there were three conceptions of what those principles should be, and that these were shaped by distinct philosophies of progress. I suggest that these philosophies, which each reconfigured Saint-Simon's ideas in different ways, underscore the hitherto unacknowledged variety of early positivist thought in France. This chapter then turns to the cosmologies of progress developed by Buchez and Leroux under the July Monarchy in the 1830s and 1840s. Although they revived earlier ideals of rights and equality, I argue that their projects of reform were embedded in collective models of improvement, but that they were each inspired by distinct and opposing strands of contemporary natural science. I show that Leroux drew on evolutionary ideas to promote the advent of a "religion of humanity," while Buchez called for a regenerated Christianity on the basis of "fixist" principles of natural history. Despite their sometimes fantastical nature, these approaches contributed to the diffusion of new and influential ideas of progress in the nineteenth century.

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Recent years have seen renewed debate on the idea of progress, partly in response to the work of the evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker. Contesting downcast perspectives of human history, Pinker has argued in a set of ambitious works that societies worldwide have seen a decline in violence and a general improvement in well-being in the past centuries, and that this has been the product of the development of civilisation, the growth of commerce and the

softening of manners these have engendered.[28] As commentators have noted, Pinker's rosy evaluations rest on overly simplistic conceptions of violence and happiness, and they restate eighteenth-century ideas of progress.[29] Less remarked upon is the fact that it was these same ideas that led to the critique of modern society developed by Rousseau and that this critique contributed to the introduction of the concept of perfectibility. Rousseau's critique also shaped the themes and concerns of the search for a science of society in France, and the thinkers involved in this search were guided as much by a pursuit of modernity as they were by a recognition of its ills. Through his arguments, then, Pinker does not simply wish to return to Enlightenment ideals; his perspective rests on a view of the eighteenth-century stripped of its critical framework.

Intellectual history may not have perennial questions, but it is certainly shaped by repeated patterns of thought. None, perhaps, have been as persistent as the ones associated with the idea of progress. By examining the history of this idea and tracing its changing and contested meaning, this thesis hopes to provide a way to break those ways of thinking. We cannot revive the social and political projects of the motley group of reformers examined this study. Whatever their merits, the crises of our time are not to be solved simply by perfecting individual rights, deepening the division of labour in society or constructing a new Christianity. Recovering the ideas and arguments of the thinkers who looked to advance such ideals nonetheless gives us a greater understanding of the paths not taken over the past two hundred years. It may also contribute to a broader awareness of our own day's imaginative constraints. It is, after all, by returning to the future that once was that we may be in a position to envision the future that is still to come.

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[28] Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011); *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).
[29] Ronald Aronson, "Pinker and Progress," *History and Theory* 52 (May 2013): 246-64; *The Darker Angels of Our Nature: Refuting the Pinker Theory of History & Violence*, eds. Philip Dwyer and Mark Micale (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

1 – The Origins of the Search

In September 1803, a short article entitled "Sur la perfectibilité" appeared in *Journal des débats et des décrets*. In this piece, likely written by the counter-revolutionary critic Joseph Fiévée, the author insisted that the term "perfectibility," though in fashion, was not well understood by contemporaries. "All human things" had a capacity for progress, he argued, but history showed "that nations go through times of obscurity and glory, barbarism and refinement." The idea that human perfectibility was indefinite, as notably claimed by Condorcet in the 1790s, was therefore "a brilliant chimera." Further to this, Fiévée maintained that recent attempts to reform government and education by appealing to notions derived from the exact sciences were dangerously misguided. What he called the "true principles" of morality, politics and literature were not "subject to calculations," nor could they be based on the study of "physiological phenomena." Only those with a disregard for "man's heart," Fiévée insisted, could support the idea of "separating morality from the idea of God" or that "society could do without religion." In his view, education thus had to encompass "moral instruction," not simply the development of the mind, and inculcate a taste for both "beauty and honesty."[30]

This critique of an important strand of late eighteenth-century social and political thought followed the contemporary turn against the ideas and policies of the revolutionary era. The rise to power of Napoléon Bonaparte after the coup of 18 Brumaire, in November 1799, led to the resurgence of religious and conservative public opinion and the repudiation of philosophies identified as republican, scientistic or both. Germaine de Staël's *De la littérature considérée avec ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800), in which she lauded the perfectibility of the human species, notably provoked a series of attacks against theories of progress associated with the

[30] [Joseph Fiévée], "Sur la perfectibilité," Variétés, *Journal des débats et des décrets*, (19 fructidor, an XI [6 september 1803]): 3-4. The claims in this article, signed only V., are repeated in his other writings: *Du dix-huit brumaire, opposé au système de la terreur* (Paris, an X [1802]), 13, n. 1, 44-45; "Esprit littéraire du XVIIIe siècle," *Mercure de France* (28 pluviôse, an XII [18 Februrary 1804]): 391-99.

French Revolution.[31] Fiévée's article came at the tail-end of this public debate, sometimes known as the "quarrel on perfectibility," and it followed other reappraisals of the direction of human history. Fiévée also associated the concept of perfectibility with the project of a science of society – a project which Condorcet had tied to the use of probability calculations and others to physiology – and denounced attempts to regenerate human minds without regard for either the Divine or the beautiful.

Neither perfectibility nor the science of society, however, was originally conceived to support projects of secular or scientific reform, nor was this science initially associated with that concept. The term *perfectibilité* was coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (1755), or *Second Discourse*, to describe the human capacity for individual and collective development. Rousseau, it is well known, was highly critical of the afflictions of modern life and he presented perfectibility not as a blessing, but as the source of human miseries. The project of a science of society, meanwhile, was first formulated in the 1760s by *les économistes*, a close-knit group of reformers now better known as the Physiocrats. Following François Quesnay, a physician in the court of Louis XV, this group promoted a programme of economic and administrative reform that sought to return society to divinely sourced principles of harmony and prosperity. In an exchange with Rousseau, one of Quesnay's collaborators thus insisted that far from promoting the perfectibility of the human mind, the Physiocrats wished "to bring it back to what is simple, to the first notions of nature and instinct."[32]

This chapter examines the development of the concept of perfectibility and of the search for a science of society from these early beginnings, and it traces their reconfiguration into the tools

[31] Madame de Staël-Holstein, *De la littérature considérée avec ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1800). On the reception to Staël's work, see the comprehensive summary of contemporary reviews in Madame de Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, ed. Axel Blaeschke (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), 543-76. See also Florence Lotterie, "L'année 1800 – Perfectibilité, progrès et révolution dans *De la littérature* de Mme de Staël," *Romantisme*, no. 108 (2000): 9-22.

[32] [Victor Riquetti, marquis de Mirabeau to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 30 July 1767], in [Nicolas Baudeau], *Précis de l'ordre légal* (Amsterdam, 1768), 204.

that shaped the visions of reform of Condorcet, Sieyès and others during the French Revolution. I begin with a close reading of the passage in which the term *perfectibilité* first appeared, before relating this concept to Rousseau's wider critique of modern society and his attempt to outline a rustic alternative. I then turn to the ideas of Quesnay and his followers, and I explore the relationship between physiocracy, perfectibility and the project of a science of society, bringing to light that the term *science sociale* first appeared in 1767 in a work by one of Quesnay's associates (not, as historians until now believed, in a 1789 pamphlet by Sieyès). The final part of this chapter investigates the redefinition of the concept of perfectibility after Rousseau, and it outlines two of the models of human improvement that ensued: the first, advanced by Helvétius, emphasised the convergence of minds around uniform principles of knowledge and morality; the second, developed by d'Holbach, with the help of Diderot, centred on the social harmonisation of divergent individual capacities and talents.[33]

This chapter suggests that the origins of the search for a science of society in France can be traced back to moral and philosophical debates in the second half of the eighteenth century. In doing so, it follows a well-established line of historical argument that associates Enlightenment visions of progress and happiness with the ideals of the French Revolution.[34] This relationship has recently received renewed attention in the works of Jonathan Israel, who has argued that the social and political ideology of thinkers like Condorcet and Sieyès can be traced back to what he calls "a vanguard of philosophical republicans" that included Helvétius, d'Holbach and Diderot

[33] As previously mentioned, I build here on the distinction between convergence and divergence-oriented conceptions of perfectibility put forward by Michael Sonenscher in "Sociability, Perfectibility and the Intellectual Legacy of Rousseau."

[34] On the rise of happiness as a social and political ideal in the eighteenth century, see Darrin McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (London: Penguin Books, 2007); David Wootton, "Utility: In Place of Virtue," chap. 5 in *Power, Pleasure, and Profit: Insatiable Appetites from Machiavelli to Madison* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). On Enlightenment conceptions of society, see Keith Baker, "Enlightenment and the Institution of Society: Notes for a Conceptual History," in *Main Trends in Cultural History*, eds. Willem Melching and Wyger Velema (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 95-120; David Carrithers, "The Enlightenment Science of Society," in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, eds. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter and Robert Wokler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 232-70.

(but not Rousseau and the Physiocrats).[35] This approach has been faulted, however, for its reductive assumptions.[36] This chapter instead follows scholarship that stresses the protracted and often overlapping sets of arguments that shaped eighteenth-century ideas of progress and the gradual process of transformation and reinterpretation that defined them.[37] I nonetheless highlight the significance of distinct models of human improvement in this period. I argue that those models, which cut across the putative distinction, proposed by Israel, between moderate and radical Enlightenment, supplied important conceptual resources to the search for a science of society in late eighteenth-century France.

In a recent study, Florence Lotterie has outlined the intellectual context in which Rousseau introduced the concept of perfectibility and traced the ways in which it shaped ensuing discussions of human improvement.[38] This chapter builds on this study, but it provides a more detailed analysis of the ideas of a set of thinkers who followed, at least in part, Rousseau's critique of modern society. Like Rousseau, the Physiocrats condemned luxury and self-interest, Helvétius warned of the dangers of a lack of public virtue, while d'Holbach underlined the risks of not following the general will. Unlike Rousseau, however, these theorists all put forward proposals for regenerating modern monarchies like France. The Physiocrats developed a project of reform centred on changes to economic, fiscal and legal arrangements. Helvétius and d'Holbach emphasised the benefits of moral education and public enlightenment. All of them, in different ways, derived their approaches from an account of individual human faculties and from

[35] Jonathan I. Israel, *The Enlightenment That Failed: Ideas, Revolution, and Democratic Defeat, 1748-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3. See also, from the same author, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution and Human Rights, 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).
[36] Antoine Lilti, "Comment écrit-on l'histoire intellectuelle des Lumières? Spinozisme, radicalisme et philosophie," *Annales. Histoires, Sciences Sociales*, no. 1 (Jan-Feb. 2009): 171-206.
[37] See the list of works cited in footnotes 11 and 12.
[38] Lotterie, *Progrès et perfectibilité*.

an analysis of the capacities of individual minds, in particular. It was thus that Rousseau's concept of perfectibility came to be redefined as a beneficent attribute of human nature.

The ideas and perspectives of the thinkers examined in this chapter played a central role in shaping early French social science. Notwithstanding his critique of modern society, the moral and political arguments of Rousseau contributed to the focus on constitutional design by revolutionary theorists like Sieyès, while his conception of human nature and views on education influenced Condorcet's approach. The Physiocrats' theory on natural rights, meanwhile, informed discussions of social and political reform in France, even if subsequent theorists usually opposed the specific measures they put forward. It was Helvétius and d'Holbach who nonetheless inspired, explicitly and implicitly, the models of human improvement advanced by later proponents of a science of society. They did so because they developed conceptions of perfectibility predicated on principles of sensationist psychology and the eighteenth-century "science of man," and they formulated philosophies oriented towards the secular reform of morality and politics. In looking to the future, rather than the past, these philosophies would shape the search for a science of society in France in significant ways. At least, until its rearticulation in the early nineteenth century, following the "quarrel on perfectibility."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The Concept of Perfectibility

The work in which the term "perfectibility" was coined, Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, was an answer to a prize essay competition set by the Dijon Academy on the origins and legitimacy of human inequality. In the preface of this work, Rousseau highlighted the difficulty of the question, as it brought into play the issue of the original features of human existence. Comparing the human soul to the statue of Glaucus, "which time, sea and storms had so disfigured that it looked less like a God than a ferocious beast," Rousseau insisted that it had been so thoroughly

altered by the development of society that it was "almost unrecognisable" from its initial state. To answer the Dijon Academy's question, it was therefore necessary to distinguish between the intrinsic and acquired attributes of the soul, a task that Rousseau described as "disentangling what is original and artificial in the present nature of man."[39] He introduced the concept of perfectibility as he looked to carry out this task: the determination of the essential and underlying attributes of the nature of man.[40] The account he set out in this work was the starting point for a series of subsequent discussions about the human capacity for improvement in France. It thus calls for close scrutiny.

As Rousseau presented it in his reply to the Dijon Academy, there were two sides to human nature. The first encompassed the qualities and faculties of man's physical constitution, which gave rise to the basic needs that humans shared with animals, such as food and shelter. The second, he claimed, was "metaphysical and moral," and it also had two components. The first was freedom, Rousseau argued, since humans were capable of exercising choice over their actions. They were "free agents," he thus suggested, and it was in the "consciousness of this freedom" that man displayed "the spirituality of his soul."[41] Conceding that this claim may be subject to disagreement, Rousseau went on to propose that the second component of man's metaphysical and moral nature was, by contrast, incontrovertible:

> But, even if the difficulties surrounding all these questions leave some room for disagreement about this difference between man and animal, there is another very specific property that distinguishes them, and over which there can be no debate, this is the faculty of perfecting oneself [*la faculté de se perfectionner*]; a faculty which, with the aid of circumstances, successively develops all the others and resides in us, in the species as well as in the individual…[42]

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[39] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Second Discourse* [1755], in *The Discourses and Other Early Writings*, transl. and ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 124-25 (I have modified the translation of this work in minor ways throughout this section of the chapter). For the original edition, see Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (Amsterdam, 1755). On the concept of perfectibility, see also Henri Gouhier, "La "perfectibilité" selon J.-J. Rousseau," *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 110, no. 4 (1978): 321-39.

[40] I employ the terms "man" and "human" interchangeably in this part of the chapter, in keeping with Rousseau's tendency time to amalgamate, not unintentionally, male and universal human experience.

[41] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 140-41.

[42] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 141.

According to Rousseau, the incontestable marker of human-animal difference was the faculty of perfecting oneself, or what he went on to call "perfectibility" (*perfectibilité*). An animal, he claimed, was "after several months, what it will be for the rest of its life, and its species, after a thousand years, what it was in the first of the thousand." Drawing on the ideas of Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, the leading French naturalist of the time, Rousseau insisted that humans were endowed with a natural capacity to transform themselves, as individuals and as a species, and to acquire faculties and dispositions that were non-existent in their original condition.[43]

Although the capacity for perfectibility appeared to imply a propensity for improvement, Rousseau argued that it was in fact a vehicle for moral degeneration. This "distinctive and almost unlimited faculty," he suggested immediately after introducing it, could be regarded as "the source of all of man's miseries": it was the faculty that drew man "from that original condition in which he would spend tranquil and innocent days" and which, "causing his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues to bloom, eventually makes him his own and nature's tyrant."[44] As Rousseau went on to explain, in a note at the end of his work, man was "naturally good," but the changes he had experienced in his progress had "depraved him." Although human society was admired, he continued, "it was no less true that it necessarily brought men to hate each other in proportion as their interests' clash," and that they did each other "every imaginable harm."[45] The ills to which society gave rise, he argued, included superfluous needs, excessive wealth and luxury, unbridled passions and the violent desire for domination. In this

[43] For Buffon's account of human specificity, see Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, "Discours sur la nature de l'homme," in *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière* (Paris, 1749), 2:438-43. On Rousseau's use of Buffon's ideas, see, most recently, Emma Planinc, "*Homo Duplex*: The Two Origins of Man in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*," *History of European Ideas* 47, no. 1 (2021): 71-90.
[44] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 141.
[45] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, note IX, 197-98.

way, Rousseau developed his concept of perfectibility around a sharp distinction between original goodness and acquired vice, or between the natural and the social.[46]

The crucial feature of Rousseau's account was that none of the developments engendered by perfectibility were inherent to human nature, nor were they pre-determined. The departure from man's original state was not the product of moral error, in his view, and it did not mean that the human soul was in a condition of irremediable sin, in contrast to the Christian doctrine of the Fall. In what he called the "state of nature," Rousseau argued that human beings lived a simple, equal existence in relative independence: they were "without industry, without speech [and] without settled abode," and they were guided by their instinct like animals. In this state, perfectibility and the capacities it produced were merely "in potentiality."[47] According to Rousseau, the exit from the natural state did not originate in human need or in the individual inclination to develop social relations, as theorists in the natural law tradition sometimes maintained. Rather, it was the product of external causes, such as floods and earthquakes, which brought humans closer together and forced them to interact with each other. It was environmental events such as these that were the starting point, he claimed, for the series of developments that led to establishment of unequal and conflict-ridden modern societies.[48]

For Rousseau, perfectibility was in other words a poisoned chalice. It was the faculty that defined humans in the natural world and allowed them to progress, individually and collectively, beyond their original state. It also made possible, however, a set of vices and ills that had not existed in

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[46] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, note IX, 199. On the role of Rousseau's works in diffusing the idea of a distinction between "natural" and "social" man in this period, see Yair Mintzker, ""A Word Newly Introduced into Language": The Appearance and Spread of "Social" in French Enlightened Thought, 1745–1765," *History of European Ideas* 34, n. 4 (2008): 500-13.

[47] In this state, Rousseau suggested, humans could be considered as animals with simply better developed faculties. By considering man "as he must have emerged from the hands of nature," he wrote, "I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but on balance the most advantageously organized of all." Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 134, 157, 159.

[48] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 162-65. On Rousseau and the question of original sin, see Ioannis D. Evrigenis, "Freeing Man from Sin: Rousseau on the Natural Condition of Mankind," in *Rousseau and Freedom*, eds. Christie McDonald and Stanley Hoffmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9-23.

this state. In Rousseau's account, the concept of perfectibility served to explain the process of denaturation by which humans had transformed themselves from a condition in which they resembled animals, and in which they lived a uniform, independent existence, to one in which they acquired an array of new and artificial needs, capacities and passions. This account – Rousseau's alternative to the doctrine of the Fall – built on mid-eighteenth-century ideas of natural science, and it was an intervention into contemporary debates about human-animal difference as well as of the place of humans in nature.[49] The concept of perfectibility was also one component of the broader critique of modern society Rousseau developed in his works. This critique gave this concept its full meaning and significance, and it set the terms for later discussions of human improvement in France.

The Critique of Modern Society

It is well known that Rousseau's critique of modern society was inspired by a moment of revelation he experienced in 1749 on the way to visit Diderot, then imprisoned at Vincennes. Having read an essay question set by the Dijon Academy – "whether the restoration of the sciences and the arts has contributed to the purification of morals" – Rousseau came to the realisation that this restoration had not simply failed to purify morals, it had entirely corrupted them. This became the central argument of his first work, the prize-winning *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, or *First Discourse* (1751), which launched Rousseau's career as a writer. Notwithstanding his revelation on the way to Vincennes, Rousseau's attack on the technical and scientific achievements of the day was also as a response to the works of two thinkers, who each, in different ways, played a role in shaping evaluations of modern society in the second half of the eighteenth century: Étienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac and Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu. A summary description of their work will illuminate the themes behind Rousseau's

[49] Lotterie, *Progrès et perfectibilité*, 13-25.

critique. It also serves to provide a broader picture of the intellectual origins of the search for a science of society in France.

Condillac was a seminarian in Paris, before becoming involved in *salons* life in Paris during the 1740s.[50] Sometimes labelled "the philosopher of the *philosophes*," Condillac developed an influential theory of knowledge founded on a rejection of innate ideas (the view that individuals were born with pre-conceived notions or concepts). Building on the philosophy of John Locke, he argued that sensitive experience was the sole source of human knowledge and that individuals possessed a natural capacity to acquire ideas, develop their intellectual faculties and communicate with each other.[51] According to Condillac, the experience of need combined with the human inclination to help one another were the basis, to borrow Avi Lifschitz's phrasing, for the mutual emergence of language, mind and society.[52] These views rested on Condillac's belief in God's providential design of the world, and they pointed to the potential for harmony of knowledge and morality in society.[53] This philosophy, which Condillac subsequently appeared to bring closer to a single-substance metaphysics in *Traité des sensations* (1754), was a major inspiration to Enlightenment theories of mind and language, and it would later be adapted by Sieyès and the Idéologues, among others.[54]

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[50] Rousseau was a close acquaintance, having tutored Condillac's nephews in the early 1740s, and he helped Condillac published his first work. Isabel F. Knight, *The Geometric Spirit: The Abbé de Condillac and the French Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 7-8.

[51] [Étienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac], *Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1746). On Condillac's revision of Locke, see John C. O'Neal, "Condillac and the Meaning of Experience," chap. 1 in *The Authority of Experience: Sensationist Theory in the French Enlightenment* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 13-24.

[52] Avi Lifschitz, "The Mutual Emergence of Language, Mind, and Society," chap. 1 in *Language and Enlightenment: The Berlin Debates of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[53] Condillac's approach, it is now known, was shaped by engagement with the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and he composed an essay of Leibnizian inspiration in the late 1740s. [Condillac], "Les monades. Dissertation," in *Dissertation qui a remporté le prix proposé par l'Académie royale des sciences et belles lettres sur le système des monades avec les pièces qui ont concouru* (Berlin, 1748), 407-512; now republished in Condillac, *Les monades*, ed. Laurence L. Bongie (Oxford: Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 1980).

[54] There is no comprehensive history of the legacy of Condillac's philosophy the eighteenth century. On his philosophy of language and its reception, see Hans Aarsleff, "Philosophy of Language," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 451-95.

Montesquieu was a noble landowner and magistrate from Bordeaux. In his masterwork *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), he put forward an original typology of governments and emphasised the range of factors, from religion to climate, that gave shape to them.[55] This work is often remembered for its description of the English political system, as well as for its praise of the pacifying virtues of commerce. Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* nonetheless also contained an account of the French monarchy and the set of institutions which, he believed, were essential to its continued power and prosperity. Montesquieu argued that a monarchy required a nobility, acting as a moderating influence on the power of the sovereign. He also claimed that a monarchical state was not sustained by political virtue, in contrast to republics, but by self-interested forms of behaviour and notably by personal ambition (what he called "honour"). In addition to this, he insisted that it should favour trade in luxury goods, as this type of trade followed from the inequality of wealth that characterised a monarchical state, and it promoted the "spring" of monarchy, self-interest.[56] These claims, it has been shown, shaped debates over the regeneration of the French monarchy for decades to come.[57]

Rousseau diverged from both Condillac and Montesquieu, and the critique of modern society he put forward in his works connected what he took to be the mistakes of the first to the errors of the second. As he argued in his *First Discourse*, different branches of human knowledge were the product of irrational and immoral inclinations, not, as Condillac supposed, of benign sensitive experience. "Astronomy was born of superstition," Rousseau claimed in this work, "eloquence of ambition, hatred, flattery, lying; geometry, of greed; physics, of a vain curiosity; all of them,

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[55] [Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu], *De l'esprit des loix ou du rapport que les loix doivent avoir avec la constitution de chaque gouvernement, les moeurs, le climat, la religion, le commerce, etc.*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1748). In the late 1740s, Rousseau was hired to help Claude Dupin, a rich tax-farmer, write a refutation of Montesquieu's work. On the Montesquieu's influence on Rousseau, see Michael Sonenscher, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Division of Labour, the Politics of the Imagination and the Concept of Federal Government* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 33-47.

[56] Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des loix*, bk. 7, ch. 4. On Montesquieu's social and political philosophy, see Céline Spector, *Montesquieu: pouvoirs, richesses et sociétés* (Paris: Hermann, 2011).

[57] Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

even ethics itself, of human pride."[58] The development of the arts and sciences, he further argued, undermined the simple mores of "rustic" societies, which were less cultivated and less knowledgeable than modern polities, but more healthy, honest and virtuous. The arts and sciences also fostered idleness and ill-health, luxury and vanity, he claimed, and they undermined both the love of country and the love of God. *Contra* Condillac, Rousseau insisted that knowledge and morality did not go hand in hand. "Our souls," as he put it, "have become corrupted in proportion as our sciences and our arts have advanced towards perfection."[59]

If Rousseau's *First Discourse* challenged the presuppositions of Condillac's philosophy of knowledge, his *Second Discourse* contested Montesquieu's political theory.[60] As mentioned, Montesquieu emphasised the pacifying virtues of commerce as well as the stabilising effects of certain forms of inequality. In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau countered these views by examining the process through which humans had putatively evolved from a natural to a civilised state. Rousseau's account of this process – the story of the dispositions and capacities successively engendered by the faculty of human perfectibility – was a tale of rise and decline. Although he recognised the value of certain developments, he argued that modern societies were plagued by inequalities of wealth, power and rank and they were, for this reason, corrupt and unstable. Outlining what he called "the progress of inequality," Rousseau portrayed his own time as locked into a cycle of revolutions in which the institution of a lawful political order would invariably give way to arbitrary power, which, in turn, would lead to the emergence of a new state of nature. Against Montesquieu, Rousseau argued that whatever their form of government, unequal societies would all eventually give rise to despotism and the dissolution of the state.[61]

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[58] Rousseau, *First Discourse* [1751], in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, 16.
[59] Rousseau, *First Discourse*, 9.
[60] The *First Discourse* can also be read as a critique of Montesquieu, in particular Montesquieu's apology of commerce: Christopher Kelly, "Rousseau and the Illustrious Montesquieu," in *The Challenge of Rousseau*, eds. Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19-33.
[61] Rousseau, *Second Discourse,* 181-86.

There were two turning points in the conjectural history of inequality outlined in the *Second Discourse*. These represented two key stages in Rousseau's conception of perfectibility. The first was the transition from the state of nature to the state in which humans began to interact with one another. Induced by external causes, those interactions prompted the acquisition of the primary set of capacities that made it possible for individuals to sustain and deepen their relations. According to Rousseau, these included elementary forms of reflection, the development of language and the rise of sentiments of public esteem. These led to the emergence of social institutions such as the family, basic ideas of morality, early forms of industry and plant domestication and the first notions of private property. Importantly, Rousseau suggested that individuals in this state remained relatively equal, as they retained much of their natural independence. In Rousseau's view, this was "the stage reached by most of the savage peoples [*sic*] known to us." It was also, he crucially claimed, "the least subject to revolutions" and therefore "the best for man."[62]

The second key moment in Rousseau's history was the invention of metallurgy. Following "some extraordinary event," he suggested ("such as a volcano throwing up molten metal"), humans developed the practice of mining and smelting ore. It was less the practice itself, however, than its effects that transformed the human species. "As soon as men were needed to melt and forge iron," Rousseau claimed, "others were needed to feed them."[63] No longer able to meet their own needs, individuals were now dependent on others to survive. The invention of metallurgy was followed by the development of agriculture, and this contributed to a separation of tasks between those who cultivated the land and those who paid for its products. This made it possible for inequalities of wealth to emerge, Rousseau maintained, along with new needs and the vices of luxury. Once these developments unfolded, human beings reached a state of near-

[62] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 162-67.
[63] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 169.

complete moral and intellectual development, he argued, but it was a state that encouraged "ostentatious display," "deceitful cunning," "consuming ambition" and "a black inclination to harm one another." For Rousseau, the full unfolding of human perfectibility gave way to the bleak cycle of revolutions in which unequal societies were locked.[64]

The conjectural history in Rousseau's *Second Discourse* developed the arguments of his *First Discourse*. Together, they amounted to a powerful critique of modern society and the institutions which, following Condillac and Montesquieu, were taken to define it. The putative progress of the human condition, in Rousseau's view, had seen the development of a set of gradual, but seemingly irreversible processes that had destroyed natural equality and freedom and had culminated in the establishment of a corrupt and unstable social order. The pursuit of knowledge and the division of labour in particular had encouraged the growth of harmful and destructive vices, including social interdependence, idleness and self-interest. Rousseau stressed the contingency of those developments, however, and he depicted, in both of his first works, stages of society in which humans enjoyed a happy medium of dependence and independence. As he described it, there existed a state in which perfectibility had spawned the necessary capacities for social life, without yet provoking the ills that undermined collective harmony. The possibility of returning to such a state of balance would inspire a range of subsequent thinkers in France, and none more so than the Physiocrats. For Rousseau, however, humankind had reached the decrepitude of old age, and it could not turn back the clock.[65]

The Rustic Alternative

Before turning to the ideas of Quesnay and his followers, it is worth briefly detailing Rousseau's attempt to provide a solution to contemporary ills, as it would cast a long shadow on the search

[64] "Here, then, are all our faculties developed, memory and imagination brought into play, amour propre interested, reason become active, and the mind almost at the limit of the perfection of which it is capable." Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 170. For his critique of luxury, see *Second Discourse*, note IX, 201-02.
[65] "Letter by J. J. Rousseau to M. Philopolis," in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, 224-25.

for a science of society in France. Rousseau did not propose the return to an earlier social state, but he did consider that it might be possible to revive elements of the lifestyle associated with humanity's putative infancy. He also suggested that it may be feasible, under certain conditions, to preserve and perfect societies that remained relatively undeveloped, socially and economically. According to Rousseau, guidance on these matters could not, however, be provided by the standard source of normative argument in the eighteenth century, the modern tradition of natural law, because this state-centred strand of thought only served to justify existing power relations, and absolute government in particular.[66] This implied that a new form of knowledge was required to shape contemporary efforts at moral and political reform. Rousseau did not go as far as to articulate this new knowledge, but in a set of works, published one week apart in 1762, he outlined two possible ways of mitigating modern afflictions.[67]

In *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762), Rousseau provided a detailed account of how a male child could be raised in such a way that he would become a virtuous, healthy and independent citizen. Against the view that men and women should receive the same education, as argued by Helvétius, Rousseau proposed a distinction between the education of boys and girls, because of the different roles they were to occupy in society. In tune with his critique of modern society, Rousseau highlighted the importance of raising children in the country, in order for them to imbibe the just and simple mores of peasants. He also outlined a plan of education attuned to what he considered to be the stages of child development, with an emphasis on self-learning and physical exercise, as well as on the supposedly unequal capacities of the sexes.[68] He insisted, finally, on the acquisition of manual skills that fostered independence and self-reliance, and he

[66] For his critique of modern natural law, and the approach of Hugo Grotius in particular, see Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract* [1762], in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. and transl. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42-43, 46-47, 59; *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1964), 584-85.
[67] Rousseau never completed the great work on politics he began to plan in the early 1750s and which he gave the title *Institutions politiques*. On this project, see Robert Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps* (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 52-55. There is a case to be made that this critique formed the basis for the later project of a science of society, in so far as it amounted to a new way of conceptualising the law of nature and nations. For this view, see Sonenscher, "Ideology, Social Science and General Facts."
[68] Rousseau, *Émile*, 82-85; on the education of girls, see the section on "Sophie ou la femme," 445-514.

praised the virtues of agricultural work, which he described as the "most honest," "most useful" and "most noble" of occupations.[69] This plan was inspired by "the simplicity of country life," Rousseau explained, and the happy lives of "primitive patriarchs."[70]

In *Du contrat social*, also published in 1762, Rousseau detailed the principles of what he considered to be a just and free political order, similarly conceived to foment virtuous and independent citizens. According to Rousseau, this order had to be founded on the sovereignty of the compound interest of the citizenry – what he called the "general will" — as well as on moral and political equality. Rousseau set out the constitutional mechanisms that were required to sustain this order, and he also emphasised the need to inculcate patriotic allegiance to the state in citizens. Crucially, Rousseau followed Montesquieu in suggesting that political liberty was contingent on particular social and economic conditions. Unlike Montesquieu, however, he argued that those conditions were that a society be in the early stages of its development, that it was small and that it refrained from pursuing both external commerce and war. As Rousseau presented it in *Du contrat social*, only a self-sufficient society, in which its members retained a degree of simplicity and independence from each other, could sustain a just and harmonious politics. It also required the institution of a strict distinction between government and the sovereignty of the general will – which could not be represented – along with the establishment of a civil religion committing citizens to belief in God and in "the sanctity of the social contract."[71]

Rousseau in this way outlined two possible solutions to modern ills. One focused on the individual cultivation of rustic mores, simple virtues and the skills required to practice independent occupations such as agriculture. The second centred on the establishment of a

[69] Rousseau, *Émile*, 226.
[70] Rousseau, *Émilius, or an Essay on Education*, 2 vols., transl. Thomas Nugent (London, 1763), 2:394.
[71] Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, 150-51. On the scaled-up, federal version of Rousseau's conception of republican government, see Sonenscher, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

political order based on the moral and legal institutions of the social contract. Both would play an important role in shaping the ideas of the later proponents of a science of society. These theorists would nonetheless adapt Rousseau's solutions in ways that cut against his own evaluations. Condorcet, for one, would emphasise the importance of public education in mitigating social inequalities, but he promoted the diffusion of precisely the type of knowledge that Rousseau claimed had a corrupting influence on the public. Sieyès would pay close attention to the constitutional provisions required for a free and stable political order. He would nonetheless seek to extend the principle of the division of labour to the realm of government, the principle which Rousseau had identified as a source of harmful social interdependency. Invariably, late eighteenth-century French social science would promote the capacity for perfectibility, conceived, *contra* Rousseau, as a beneficent attribute, not as a source of human misery.

Although he put forward proposals for individual and collective improvement in his works, Rousseau characteristically did not outline these proposals with reference to the notion of perfectibility. In fact, after introducing the term in his *Second Discourse*, he never mentioned it again in his writings. This may have been because he associated the concept with the ills of modern life, or because his critics redefined this concept and its putative outcomes in more positive ways as soon as it was coined, as I discuss later in this chapter. It may also have been because Rousseau's social and political ideal was inspired by a state of human existence that no longer existed, at least in Europe, and that was, as he himself claimed, no longer possible.[72] For Rousseau, if a few rural nations such as Corsica or Poland could escape the self-defeating logic

[72] "On traite l'âge d'or de chimère, et c'en sera toujours une pour quiconque a le cœur et le goût gâtés. Il n'est pas même vrai qu'on le regrette, puisque ces regrets sont toujours vains. Que faudrait-il donc pour le faire renaître? une seule chose, mais impossible, ce serait de l'aimer." Rousseau, *Émile*, 606 (I have modernised the spelling of this and all subsequent French citations.)

of modern commercial society, Europe's large and established monarchies could not.[73] The search for a science of society in France began on the basis of the opposite evaluation.

François Quesnay and his Followers

Mirabeau's "Social Science"

The term "social science" (*science sociale*) first appeared in 1767 in work by Victor Riquetti, marquis de Mirabeau, a noble landowner who had taken a close interest in moral and political reform since the late 1740s. Unlike later iterations of the term, Mirabeau employed it to describe what he considered to be the advanced state of knowledge in social affairs of contemporary European societies.[74] The term appeared in the second of Mirabeau's letters in the journal *Éphémérides du citoyen* addressing the "depravation of the legal order," later republished in *Lettres sur la législation ou l'ordre légal, dépravé, rétabli et perpétué* (1775). This letter retraced what Mirabeau described as "the progress of all the principles of our decadence," and it focused on the series of ill-advised policies taken by European societies and their leaders since the fifteenth century.[75] For Mirabeau, the "social science" those societies were taken to hold did not reflect a process of moral or intellectual improvement. The "progress" of European decadence instead underscored the need to return society to original principles: those which had guided "the first men" who, by

[73] Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, 72-78, 100-04. Rousseau later composed a draft constitution for Corsica, which would appear only posthumously, as well as a series of proposals for the reform of the Polish state, published in 1772.

[74] The passage in question reads: "Cette digression vous fait à peu près l'histoire fiscale de toutes les nations passées et présentes, c'est-à-dire celle de leur constitution politique et fiscale; car encore un coup, c'est là le point fondamental. Je prends pour exemple celles de toute l'Europe, qui, quoiqu'on en dise, sont les plus avancées dans la *science sociale* et dans toutes les connaissances qui en résultent: ce n'est pas la peine de revoir les choses passées, si nous n'en tirons quelqu'instruction pour le futur, et la présomption moderne mérite d'être considérée du moins dans ses principaux appuis." [emphasis added] Mirabeau, "La dépravation de l'ordre légal. Seconde lettre," 63. On Mirabeau, see Liana Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 83-87; Auguste Bertholet, "The Intellectual Origins of Mirabeau," *History of European Ideas* 47, no. 1 (2021): 91-96.

[75] Those mistakes included taking inspiration from the Ancients, the development of the arts and sciences and imperial conquest. Mirabeau, "La dépravation de l'ordre légal. Seconde lettre," 5-72; *Lettres sur la législation ou l'ordre légal, dépravé, rétabli et perpétué*, 3 vols. (Berne, 1775), 1:60-124.

cultivating the land to survive, had founded society on "the natural, primitive and constitutive law of all human associations."[76]

Mirabeau was an early convert to the economic system devised by François Quesnay, and his letters on the depravation of the European legal and political order were one of several works in which he sought to publicise this system. The personal physician of Madame de Pompadour, a favourite of Louis XV, Quesnay was a member of the inner circle of the court in the late 1750s and early 1760s. It was around this time that he developed his *tableau économique*, in which he presented an ideal model of the circulation of capital derived from the surplus, or "net product," generated by agricultural production, the only reliable source of wealth in his view. Devised during the Seven Years' War (1756-63), this model served as the basis of an ambitious programme of reforms intended to restore the glory and prosperity of the French monarchy. This programme sought the establishment of what Quesnay called an "agricultural kingdom," and its proposals included free trade in grain and the introduction of a single tax on the surplus of landed income. Through his influence at the court, Quesnay's system attracted a small and influential group of followers, including Mirabeau and, later, Condillac, who would popularise and develop this system.[77]

The term "social science" appeared just once in Mirabeau's work, and there is no knowing why it was not employed again by any writer until 1789, at least in print.[78] One reason may have been

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[76] Mirabeau, "La dépravation de l'ordre légal. Première lettre," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 9 (1767): 82-83.
[77] The scholarly literature on Quesnay and his followers is extensive. For a helpful way in, see Loïs Charles and Christine Théré, "The Physiocratic Movement: A Revision," chap. 2 in *The Economic Turn: Recasting Political Economy in Enlightenment Europe*, eds. Sophus Reinert and Steven Kaplan (London: Anthem Press, 2019). See also Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy: Economic Revolution and Social Order in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Catherine Larrère, *L'invention de l'économie au XVIIIe siècle: du droit naturel à la physiocratie* (Paris: PUF, 1992); Loïc Charles and Philippe Steiner, "Entre Montesquieu et Rousseau. La Physiocratie parmi les origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française," *Études Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, no. 11 (1999): 83-160; Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*; Vardi, *Physiocrats and the World of Enlightenment*.
[78] Mirabeau did employ the very similar descriptor "social and economic science" (*science sociale et économique*) once in the same work, in the context of a discussion of the education of children. There, he presented this science as one that would remove from children "the veil that hid from them the theatre of the existing world." Mirabeau, "Quinzième lettre de M. B. à M…, et la troisième sur la stabilité de l'ordre légal," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 12 (1768): 8-9.

the ambiguous meaning Mirabeau ascribed to it. As he presented it, the science of society was the most advanced in Europe because of its lengthy fiscal and political history, yet this history was also one of gradual ruin. "Social science," from this perspective, was the science of failed social experiments. More probably, the reason was that around the same time Quesnay's followers coined another term to promote their system: physiocracy (*physiocratie*). As Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, another convert to Quesnay's system who popularised the term in the late 1760s, explained, physiocracy was an attempt to reduce morality and politics to a "physical science." This science, he argued, began with the "physical needs" with which God had endowed human beings and the "physical means" they had at their disposal to satisfy them. It was on this basis, he added, that the science of physiocracy could infer knowledge of the "natural social order" and devise the principles of the "most advantageous" form of government for all humankind.[79] Physiocracy, following this description, would supply the antidote to Mirabeau's "social science."

The Science of Physiocracy

The proponents of physiocracy followed Rousseau's critique of modern society in several respects. They repudiated the vices they associated with contemporary European polities, condemning the luxury, greed and self-interest they fostered, and they emphasised the destabilising effects of excessive inequalities of wealth and of the imbalanced growth of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. Like Rousseau, the Physiocrats also looked back to a golden age before those ills had taken root and when human beings enjoyed simple, rustic lives. While Rousseau emphasised the degree of independence individuals retained in this early social state, however, the Physiocrats underlined the mutual interests that brought humans together and the ability they had to meet their needs through the cultivation of land. Mirabeau, in *Lettres*

[79] Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, *Physiocratie, ou Constitution naturelle du gouvernement le plus avantageux au genre humain* (Leyden, 1768), x-xii.

sur la législation, presented this state as one in which human beings had the capacity to work together for common ends, without entering into conflict with one another:

> In this primitive state of assembly, all associates conspire, by virtue of a common and pressing need, to generate the necessary products to survive through agricultural work. There can be no schemes, no artifices, no power between them that lends itself to being usurped, seeing as there is not yet any individual ownership of wealth and that everything is oriented towards common welfare, which induces all of them to work reciprocally to that end.[80]

In Mirabeau's account, early society was characterised by a just balance between need and work, survival and assistance, and it conjoined the interests of all in an orderly and harmonious way.

In contrast to Rousseau, the Physiocrats also sought to derive a programme of reforms from the attributes of early society, one intended in the first instance for France and then expanded to other states. To divine those attributes, they did not simply rely on the type of conjectural history put forward by Mirabeau. They also appealed to the insights supplied by a particular form of knowledge. This knowledge, which they called "evidence" (*évidence*), was the product of the human capacity to receive sensations, and it supplied what the Physiocrats insisted were the moral foundations of the social order. As Quesnay presented it in his *Encyclopédie* entry on the concept of evidence, published in 1756, sensitive experience was necessarily individuated, but the "certain and constant relations" between bodies and sensations generated the sure and definitive principles of the rules of conduct, of the nature of individual interests and of the reasons behind human actions. Combined with the knowledge furnished by Christian faith, he argued, evidence provided the basis for an understanding of natural law and of the ways in which it could be applied to human society.[81]

The theory of knowledge captured by Quesnay's concept of evidence underpinned the Physiocrats' account of natural rights. In *L'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques* (1767), the

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[80] Mirabeau, "La dépravation de l'ordre légal. Première lettre," 84. For a similar description of early society, see Guillaume Le Trosne, *De l'ordre social* (Paris, 1777), 57-59.
[81] François Quesnay, "Évidence," *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols. (1751-72), eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, vol. 6 (Paris, 1756), 146-57.

once colonial administrator Pierre-Paul Le Mercier de la Rivière maintained that it was "evident" that humans were "destined" to live in society, as God had endowed them with sentiments and faculties they could only develop in the social state. It was equally "evident," he claimed, that society was natural to humans because they were compelled by the "attraction of physical pleasure" to satisfy their needs and it was "only in society that we can procure ourselves the goods relative to these needs."[82] Following Quesnay, Le Mercier insisted that a set of natural rights and duties followed from this "evidence." These included the right to satisfy one's needs, the right over the products of one's labour and the corresponding duties to respect the liberty and property of others.[83] Le Mercier also made clear that, although these rights applied equally "to all men," they did not entail the need for a level degree of property. The "inequality of conditions" was neither unnatural nor unjust, he explained, and it was only the social disorder that inequality produced that needed to be corrected, not inequality itself.[84]

The Physiocrats' account of natural rights would play an important role in shaping discussions of moral and political reform in France in the second half of the eighteenth century.[85] So would their original and controversial theory of government. This theory was famously associated with the notion of "legal despotism" (*le despotisme légal*), the view that the laws of the natural social order were best enforced by a sovereign with absolute power. According to Le Mercier, in whose work the notion was particularly prominent, the "natural despotism of evidence" supplied the sure and definitive principles of natural law and it called for an equivalent "despotism" in public administration. This, he claimed, required the institution of an absolute monarchy in which the sovereign ruled over society in the same way as God ruled over the universe.[86] Despite Le

[82] Pierre-Paul Le Mercier de la Rivière, *L'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques* (London, 1767), 3, 7.
[83] Le Mercier, *L'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*, 11-16. For a similar list of rights and duties see, Dupont de Nemours, *De l'origine et des progrès d'une science nouvelle* (Londres, Paris, 1768), 17-18. For Quesnay's own conception of natural right, see his *Le droit naturel* (Paris, 1765).
[84] Le Mercier, *L'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*, 16-17.
[85] Dan Edelstein, *On the Spirit of Rights* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019), 74-84.
[86] Le Mercier, *L'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*, 166-69, 179-89.

Mercier's emphasis on legality, this justification of absolutism entrusted no authority to moderating or limiting political institutions, unlike Montesquieu's theory of monarchy, and it thus attracted considerable criticism from contemporaries. It would also drive a wedge between those, like Mirabeau and Dupont de Nemours, who favoured the establishment of provincial assemblies, and those, like Quesnay and Le Mercier, who opposed any division of sovereign power.[87]

Notwithstanding internal divisions, the Physiocrats' emphasis on strong government was redolent of the natural law theories of Hugo Grotius and Thomas Hobbes. Their approach nonetheless diverged from those theories. Indeed, following Montesquieu and Rousseau, the Physiocrats emphasised the social and economic preconditions of political stability and harmony. Unlike Montesquieu and Rousseau, however, they considered that there existed a natural social order suited, as Dupont de Nemours described it, "to men of all climates and of all countries."[88] The Physiocrats also maintained that this natural order could be instituted in France, if not elsewhere, through a series of legal and administrative reforms. Whatever their different positions on legal despotism, the Physiocrats sought to supersede the traditional conflicts of political life, and they promoted the idea that a just and powerful sovereign should oversee the rational governance of society. Nicolas Baudeau, the editor of *Éphémérides du citoyen*, suggested that this approach implied a new conception of public policy, which he termed "the social art" (*l'art social*). Later adopted by revolutionary thinkers with different political philosophies, in Baudeau's definition the term would refer to the simple responsibilities of a physiocratic government: "instruction, protection and administration."[89]

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[87] Bernard Herencia, "L'optimum gouvernemental des physiocrates: despotisme légal ou despotisme légitime?" *Revue de philosophie économique* 14, no. 2 (2013): 119-49; Vardi, "Representative Assemblies," chap. 5 in *Physiocrats and the World of Enlightenment*.
[88] Dupont de Nemours, *De l'origine et des progrès d'une science nouvelle*, 78.
[89] Nicolas Baudeau, "Première introduction à la philosophique économique, ou analyse des états policés," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 9 (1770): 141; *Première introduction à la philosophique économique, ou analyse des états policés* (Paris, 1771), 22.

Perfectibility or its Antithesis

Despite attracting a small coterie of followers, Quesnay would encounter difficulties in convincing a wider range of actors of his system. This would alter the focus of his approach. Having initially emphasised the reform of economic processes, fiscal arrangements and the legal order, in the mid-1760s he would come to place greater emphasis on the diffusion of physiocratic principles in society.[90] The "first positive law," he declared in the second edition of *Le droit naturel* (1765), was the "institution of public and private instruction in the laws of the natural order." Without this, he argued, "government and human conduct would only be led by obscurity, confusion and disorder."[91] As signalled by Baudeau's definition of the "social art," public instruction would, along with protection and administration, thus become one of the key components of physiocratic policy in the late 1760s. The Physiocrats were nonetheless divided over whether this simply called for the inculcation of the laws of the natural order or the education of the public in general. Related to this, there was also debate as to whether physiocracy presumed a human capacity for perfectibility, or whether the success of its reforms in fact relied on its antithesis.

The ambiguity in the Physiocrats' approach to social improvement was the source of a famous epistolary exchange between Mirabeau and Rousseau in 1767, subsequently published in Baudeau's *Précis de l'ordre legal* (1768).[92] The exchange was prompted by Mirabeau sending Rousseau a copy of Le Mercier's recently published *L'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*. In response, Rousseau wrote a trenchant critique of the notion of legal despotism, along with the concept of "evidence" on which it was predicated. Rousseau also maintained that Le Mercier's conception of physiocracy resembled the "system of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre," the earlier proponent of a plan for perpetual peace, who had "claimed that human reason was forever

[90] On this shift, see Charles and Steiner, "Entre Montesquieu et Rousseau," 96-99.
[91] Cited in Charles and Steiner, "Entre Montesquieu et Rousseau," 99.
[92] Baudeau, *Précis de l'ordre legal*, 190-234.

perfecting itself."[93] In his reply, Mirabeau maintained that Rousseau had misunderstood the project of physiocracy in general and the concept of "evidence" in particular. "You think that we are pursuing the perfectibility of the human mind and want to extend its limits," Mirabeau remarked. "Far from it," he argued, "we only want to bring it back to what is simple, to the first notions of nature and instinct."[94]

This exchange between Mirabeau and Rousseau serves to illuminates the divergent models of human improvement and, specifically, the divergent conceptions of public education developed by Quesnay's followers in the late 1760s and early 1770s. As his reply to Rousseau indicated, Mirabeau considered that physiocracy was not contingent upon the perfectibility of the human mind, and it looked instead to simplify its conceptions and inclinations. Following this view, Mirabeau maintained that once the knowledge of the natural laws of the social order was sufficiently developed and organised, it would simply be a question of propagating the "cult" of those laws through public instruction.[95] In a similar way, Le Mercier claimed that, just as "evangelical predication" was required to disseminate religious beliefs, so was it necessary to publicise knowledge of the natural order to "all the men born to be submitted to this order," and that everyone possessed "sufficient natural understanding" to acquire this knowledge.[96] For both Mirabeau and Le Mercier, the science of physiocracy had the authority of a religious doctrine, and the purpose of public instruction would be to convert individuals to this science, not to promote the perfectibility of minds.[97]

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[93] Rousseau to Mirabeau, 26 July 1767, in Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, 269.
[94] Mirabeau to Rousseau, in Baudeau, *Précis de l'ordre legal*, 204.
[95] Mirabeau, *Lettres sur la législation*, 3:460.
[96] Le Mercier, *L'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*, 55.
[97] This view aligned with the claim that, in so far as the natural laws of the social order derived from God, every government that followed its principles amounted to a "theocracy." Mirabeau, *Philosophie rurale, ou économie générale et politique de l'agriculture*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1763), 3:8-9; Quesnay, "Le despotisme de la Chine," *Éphémérides du citoyen* 5 (1767): 22.

Dupont de Nemours advanced a different approach. In his prospectus of the physiocratic system, published in 1768, he insisted that public magistrates needed to have "an exact, profound and complete knowledge" of the laws of the natural order. Since the nation at large needed to judge the capacity of those magistrates in fulfilling their functions, he also argued that the public needed to be "very enlightened" about its rights and duties. A system of "general and public instruction" was therefore necessary, he argued, which ensured that even "the last of citizens" had some knowledge of natural laws.[98] In a work composed in the mid-1770s, he went further and proposed to the new French king, Louis XVI, the creation of a *Conseil de l'instruction nationale* whose goal would be to establish an education system to "form, in all classes of society, virtuous and useful men, ethical souls, pure hearts and zealous citizens." As Dupont de Nemours presented it, this new system would serve to create "a virtuous and learned people" and it would "disseminate, in the hearts of all children, principles of humanity, justice, benevolence and of the love of the state." After just a few years, he claimed, the French nation would thus become "a new people."[99]

The work in which Dupont de Nemours put forward this plan, *Mémoire sur les municipalités* (1775), was commissioned by Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, baron de l'Aulne, a fellow traveller of the Physiocrats who, at the time, was Controller-General of Finances. Turgot intended to correct and revise Dupont de Nemours's work, which proposed the political renewal of the French monarchy through the creation of municipal assemblies along with the moral and intellectual regeneration of the citizenry.[100] Dupont de Nemours did not mention the notion of perfectibility in his draft, but it may well have appeared in the finalised version composed by Turgot, which never eventuated. As Condorcet later claimed, Turgot was a firm believer in the indefinite

[98] Dupont de Nemours, *De l'origine et des progrès d'une science nouvelle*, 38.
[99] [Dupont de Nemours], "Mémoire sur les municipalités," in *Œuvres posthumes de M. Turgot* (Lausanne, 1787).
[100] Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, *Œuvres de Turgot*, new ed., ed. Eugène Daire (Paris, 1844), 2:502, n. 2 (Dupont de Nemours). This strand of thought has been described as a form of "neo-physiocracy." Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say's Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61-65.

perfectibility of the human mind, and it was a belief "from which he never wavered."[101] Turgot had indeed outlined an expansive philosophy of progress in his set of lectures at the Sorbonne in 1750 in which he argued that the course of human history revealed a linear process of improvement.[102] If physiocracy, to some, was antithetical to human perfectibility, for others, therefore, the ambitious reforms that it set out, or which it inspired, may not have been possible without it.

Social Science and the Science of Man

Perfectibility After Rousseau

In *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795), Condorcet penned the most famous work ever dedicated to the idea of human perfectibility and notoriously claimed that it was indefinite in scope. One of Condorcet's surprising remarks in this text, however, was that the "first and most brilliant apostles" of this idea had been his mentor Turgot, the Welsh dissenting minister Richard Price and the Unitarian natural philosopher Joseph Priestley.[103] This genealogy did not self-evidently align with the arguments in the *Esquisse*. Although Price and Priestley were prominent advocates of intellectual and moral improvement, and while Turgot may have expressed a belief in indefinite human perfectibility in private, none of them employed this concept in their works. More significantly, all three conceived of progress within a Christian idiom.[104] Condorcet, in contrast, rejected the virtues of Christianity and his work was, among other things, an attempt to show that religion was a source of moral evil. As I discuss in the next

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[101] [Condorcet], *Vie de M. Turgot* (London, 1786), 11.
[102] Turgot, "Premier discours"; "Second discours," in *Œuvres de Mr. Turgot* (Paris, 1808), 2:19-51, 52-92. These lectures circulated in manuscript form in the eighteenth century, but they were only published in this nineteenth-century edition of his works. Dupont de Nemours is thought to have considerably revised these lectures and removed some of its more religious content. Gustave Schelle, *Turgot* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1909), 34-36.
[103] Condorcet, *The Sketch* [1795], in *Political Writings*, ed. Nadia Urbinati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 102; originally published as *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Paris, an III [1795]).
[104] Price and Priestley were part of a common Dissenting tradition, and the first promoted the establishment of a purer form of Christianity, while the second considered that political developments in his time presaged the Second Coming of Christ. Turgot, for his part, articulated a vision of progress that highlighted the virtues of Christian beliefs and emphasised their importance in improving human conduct in history. Jack Fruchtman, Jr., "The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A Study in Late Eighteenth-Century English Republican Millennialism," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 73, no. 4 (1983): 1-125; Turgot, "Premier discours."

chapter, Condorcet's genealogy reflected his unique synthesis of eighteenth-century ideas of human improvement, not the history of the concept of perfectibility after Rousseau. It was this history that nonetheless served to make the concept a central part of early French social science.

Indeed, as soon as the *Second Discourse* was published in May 1755, critics contested Rousseau's account of the origins and development of human society. They did so by highlighting the apparent contradiction within his concept of perfectibility.[105] One writer remarked that Rousseau "insisted a lot on the perfectibility of man" without realising that this capacity "undermined his system," since it meant that the development of society was "as natural as the growth of a tree."[106] In an article published in October 1755, the Genevan natural philosopher Charles Bonnet made a similar point. If society was, as Rousseau suggested, a human construct, then it was "natural to man," Bonnet insisted, and it was perfectibility that had "led man to the state in which we see him today."[107] In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau had introduced the concept of perfectibility to account for the human capacity for individual and collective development, but he had emphasised that it remained "in potentiality" in the state of nature and that society was neither natural nor necessarily advantageous. Bonnet and others disputed this evaluation, and they did so by turning the concept of perfectibility against Rousseau's system.

Not long after, a new conception of perfectibility was also developed by Claude-Adrien Helvétius, a wealthy tax farmer whose wife, Anne-Catherine de Ligniville, Madame Helvétius, hosted one of the major *salons* of the French Enlightenment. Helvétius put forward this interpretation in *De l'Esprit* (1758), a controversial but widely read work in which, drawing on the ideas of Locke and Condillac, he argued that the faculties of the human mind all derived from

[105] For a helpful survey of the critical reception to Rousseau's thought, see Jared Holley, "Rousseau's Reception as an Epicurean: From Atheism to Aesthetics," *History of European Ideas* 45, no. 4 (2019): 553-71.
[106] [François Le Prévost d'Exmes], *La revue des feuilles de Mr. Fréron* (London, 1755), 295.
[107] Philopolis [Charles Bonnet], "Lettre au sujet du discours de M. J. J. Rousseau de Genève, sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes," *Mercure de France* (October 1755), 72-73.

the operations of physical sensibility.[108] As Helvétius explained at the start of his work, human beings were equipped with similar faculties to animals, but they were distinguished in several ways and, most significantly, by the "perpetual motion" impelled in them by the desire for new impressions. "It is this necessity of being put in motion, and the kind of inquietude produced in the mind by the absence of any impression," he argued further on in *De l'Esprit*, "that contains, in part, the principle of the inconstancy and perfectibility of the human mind."[109] Perfectibility, for Helvétius, originated in the human inability to stay still, and it was driven by an aversion to boredom, or what he called *ennui*. It was not therefore activated by external causes, as Rousseau maintained; it was the product of in-built human psychology.

Condorcet did not explicitly mention this interpretation of perfectibility in his *Esquisse*, nor did he refer to Helvétius. Whilst they diverged on several crucial issues, however, they shared the same sensationist theory of the human mind, and they both rejected notions derived from Christian theology, in contradistinction to Turgot, Price and Priestley. So would the other proponents of a science of society examined in the late eighteenth century, such as Sieyès and the Idéologues, who drew more explicitly on Helvétius in their works. Like Condorcet, these thinkers considered that the ability to receive and process sensory impressions played a foundational role in shaping human understanding. They also maintained that this ability was an immanent human capacity, which did not require a belief in an immaterial or spiritual soul, and that understanding the operations of physical sensibility was crucial to determining the nature of human interests and desires. In eighteenth-century France, this way of conceptualising human experience was closely associated with the strand of medical thought known as the "science of

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[108] On the popularity of *De l'Esprit*, see Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 63-67. On the *salons* of M^me^ Helvétius, which became an important meeting point for the Idéologues during the French Revolution and was later taken over by Cabanis, see Antoine Guillois, *Le salon de Madame Helvétius. Cabanis et les Idéologues* (Paris, 1894).

[109] [Helvétius], *De l'Esprit* (Paris: Durand, 1758), 2-3, n. (a), 291. This description of the mind drew on Locke's concept of "uneasiness"; Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1690), bk. II, ch. XXI, para. 31-34. On the French reception of this concept of Locke's, see Paul Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville and the Modern Project* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 40-46.

man."[110] It was this strand of thought, I would like to suggest, along with the broader principles of sensationist psychology, that contributed to the redefinition of the concept of perfectibility in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Two models of human improvement articulated in these idioms would shape early French social science. The first, advanced by Helvétius, posited that individuals were born with the same intellectual abilities and, therefore, with an equal capacity for learning. Following Helvétius, individuals were nonetheless compelled to pursue their own interests, because of their natural desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain. According to this model, collective prosperity and happiness thus required shaping individual inclinations through the reform of laws, public education and by ensuring that every person could meet their needs through moderate work. The other model, developed by d'Holbach, likely with Diderot's assistance, emphasised the natural inequality of individual talents and capacities, but it stressed their potential for harmonisation in a society structured by a hierarchy of rank and function. Like Helvétius, d'Holbach conceived of human beings as driven by self-interest, and he promoted public education as well as a more equitable distribution of wealth. Social stability and happiness, in his view, nonetheless primarily required a just equilibrium of divergent yet symbiotic human interests and desires, not, as Helvétius proposed, the convergence of minds around uniform principles of knowledge and morality.

These two models built on Rousseau's critique of modern society. They also drew on some of the ideas of the Physiocrats. Helvétius and d'Holbach nonetheless developed alternative visions of human improvement in their time. Although they condemned the inequities of contemporary society and the vices generated by luxury, they did not look to the ideal of an early social state. They also all rejected the Christian foundations of the Physiocrats' moral philosophy, along with

[110] On this strand of thought see Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*; Williams, *The Physical and the Moral.*

their political and economic principles. Crucially, while Quesnay's followers were divided over the concept of perfectibility, Helvétius and d'Holbach had few doubts of the benefits of human improvement, and of the benefits of the perfection of knowledge in particular. They nevertheless conceived of perfectibility in different ways. Helvétius emphasised the innate equality of minds and the potential for convergence of individual interests and pleasures in society. D'Holbach, in contrast, stressed the natural inequality of individual capacities and the social benefits of human divergence. These two approaches laid the foundations for the models of human improvement developed by the later proponents of a science of society in France, who would revise, reconfigure and combine them in various different ways.

Helvétius and the Art of the Legislator

It is likely that Helvétius wrote *De l'Esprit* as a response to Montesquieu.[111] As previously discussed, in *De l'esprit des lois* Montesquieu outlined what he took to be the conditions for collective liberty and prosperity in different states. Those conditions were local in character, he claimed, and they encompassed a range of social and economic factors. Helvétius opposed this view. There were universal principles of good government, he insisted, and public policy and legislation in all polities had to have a single objective: "the greatness and happiness of a people," or what he also called "public utility."[112] According to Helvétius, the purpose of every government could be reduced to this goal because human conduct was itself driven by a single impulse. As he argued in *De l'Esprit*, individual passions and desires were all the product of interest, which he also termed "self-love," because the sole source of human ideas and opinions was physical sensibility and the basic inclination it engendered, the desire to avoid pain and seek pleasure. The art of the legislator, for Helvétius, thus consisted in forging the "union" of

[111] Helvétius critically annotated his copy of *De l'Esprit des lois* and implicitly referred to Montesquieu throughout his own work. Diderot, in his critique of *De l'Esprit*, would suggest that it amounted to "la préface de l'*Esprit des lois*," despite the fact that "l'auteur ne soit pas toujours du sentiment de Montesquieu." Diderot, "Réflexions sur le livre de l'Esprit par M. Helvétius" (1758), in *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, ed. J. Assézat (Paris, 1875), 2:273.
[112] Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 80, 157.

individual and collective interests. This was, he maintained, implicitly alluding to Montesquieu, the "true spirit of the laws."[113]

Helvétius based his moral and political arguments on the principle of physical sensibility, and he conceived of this philosophy as an extension of the eighteenth-century "science of man."[114] His approach nonetheless adapted contemporary understandings of the human mind. Driven by medical research, the nature and operations of sensibility had become a central focus of moral and philosophical discussions in the mid-eighteenth century.[115] Condillac and Quesnay had both in different ways argued that sensibility shaped human experience, but they sought to reconcile this process with the existence of a spiritual and immortal soul. Helvétius was more sceptical. In *De l'Esprit*, he declared that his own philosophy could accommodate the idea of a spiritual soul, but he noted that this idea was not itself "capable of demonstration." Suggesting an approach later adopted by Condorcet, he maintained that metaphysical questions, just as moral and political issues, were best resolved with "the assistance of the calculation of probabilities."[116] In *De l'homme*, published posthumously in 1773, Helvétius was less equivocal and argued that, if a human soul existed, it would be the same as the faculty of sensibility. According to Helvétius, therefore, there was no metaphysical difference between mind and body.[117]

Aside from its materialistic implications, the distinctive feature of Helvétius' philosophy of mind was his claim that every individual had an equal capacity for knowledge and, hence, for

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[113] Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 409, n. (a).
[114] For the reference to the science of man: Helvétius, *De l'homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles et de son education*, 2 vols. (London, 1773), 1:1-3. On his theory of the mind, see O'Neal, "Helvétius's Seminal Concept of Physical Sensibility," chap. 3 in *Authority of Experience*.
[115] Vila, "Sensibility and the Philosophical Medicine of the 1750s-1770s," chap. 2 in *Enlightenment and Pathology*.
[116] Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 5. This approach can be traced back to Hume's philosophy of knowledge. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1748), sect. VI; Keith M. Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 138-55.
[117] "L'existence de nos idées et de notre esprit suppose celle de la faculté de sentir. Cette faculté est l'âme elle-même. D'où je conclus que si l'âme n'est pas l'esprit, l'esprit est l'effet de l'âme ou de la faculté se sentir." Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 1:108. Israel emphasises the affinity between this type of one-substance philosophy and the project of moral and political reform he associated with what he calls "radical Enlightenment." For his reading of the reception of Helvétius' *De l'Esprit*, see Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 70-81.

perfectibility.[118] One of the commonplace views of the medical science of man in this period was that innate or in-built physical differences played a significant role in limiting individual abilities. As Elizabeth Williams has argued, physicians associated with the Montpellier school of medicine developed a doctrine of human "types," based on differences of temperament, sex and race, which put constraints on the individual capacity for intellectual and physical perfectibility.[119] Helvétius argued that such differences had little, if any, effect on mental capabilities. "Well-organised" human beings, to use his terms, were born with the same ability to sense, he claimed, and they therefore possessed the same capacity to acquire knowledge. Differences or inequalities of mind were all acquired, according to Helvétius, and they were the product of what he called "education," by which he meant all the sensitive impressions individuals experienced from birth onwards.[120] In contradistinction to mainstream contemporary beliefs, and in contrast to Rousseau in particular, Helvétius therefore insisted that, despite their physical differences, men and women had an equal capacity for learning.[121]

As mentioned, Helvétius' philosophy of mind involved a redefinition of Rousseau's concept of perfectibility, and he associated this concept with the human desire for new impressions. It was this desire, Helvétius argued in *De l'Esprit*, that induced in humans the need to be in constant motion and perfect the tools at their disposal to pursue their interests. In *De l'homme*, a work that included a lengthy rebuttal of Rousseau's philosophy of education, Helvétius added a further element to this account.[122] Human perfectibility was possible, he argued here, because all true

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[118] On the significance of philosophical materialism in Helvétius' moral and political thought, see Sophie Audidière, "Philosophie moniste de l'intérêt et réforme politique chez Helvétius," in *Matérialistes français du XVIIIe siècle: La Mettrie, Helvétius, d'Holbach*, eds. Sophie Audidière, Francine Markovits and Jean-Claude Bourdin (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2006), 139-65; Ann Thomson, "Materialistic Theories of Mind and Brain," in *Between Leibniz, Newton, and Kant: Philosophy and Science in the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. Wolfgang Lefèvre (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 149-73.

[119] Elizabeth A. Williams, *A Cultural History of Medical Vitalism in Enlightenment Montpellier* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 5.

[120] Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 251-89; *De l'homme*, 152-62.

[121] Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 1:153-54, n. (c).

[122] On Helvétius and Rousseau's different educational philosophies and their context, see Natasha Gill, *Educational Philosophy in the French Enlightenment: From Nature to Second Nature* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

knowledge, "once simplified and reduced to their plainest terms," could be converted into "facts" that were intelligible to all. Although he mentioned contemporary debate over the concept of "evidence," Helvétius did not follow the Physiocrats in suggesting that such simple, universal facts derived from individual experience. Rather, he claimed that this process of simplification was the principle behind the historical progress of knowledge. This principle was at work in all forms of thought, he maintained, including, crucially, in the science of morality. After a long period of obscurity and ignorance, this science was now reaching a state of certainty, according to Helvétius, and it could thus be reduced to simple facts and diffused in society, in the same way as the "systems of Locke and Newton."[123]

This conception of perfectibility pointed to the objective of Helvétius' science of government – the union of individual and collective interests. To bring those interests together, he argued, it was necessary to shape the habits and inclinations of citizens in such a way as to dispose them to act in the general interest (the definition, in his view, of virtuous conduct). There were two ways of achieving this according to Helvétius. The first involved the reform of public legislation. Since interest was the only sure and consistent motivation behind human conduct, he claimed, laws needed to systematically reward virtue and punish vice, and the legislator should rely on the desire for glory and the aversion to shame to motivate citizens to act in the general interest. As Helvétius put it, it was by "pitting passions against one another" that legislators could encourage public morality. He also maintained that the best legislative system was one in which all laws followed "the uniformity of views of the legislator" and could be brought back to the single principle of "public utility." No one had yet fully appreciated the extent or fecundity of this principle, he remarked, yet it encompassed "all morality and legislation."[124]

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[123] Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 220-25. He also conjectured that, in their final state, all branches of knowledge would be reduced to "simple and general principles" that could be summarised in a "small compendium of principles"; *De l'Esprit*, 501. On the historical obstacles to the progress of morality, see *De l'Esprit*, 222-27.
[124] Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 159, 175, 220-21.

The second way of promoting virtue was through public education. Ignorance was one of the main sources of human vice, Helvétius insisted, as it contributed to moral corruption and servility. It was therefore necessary to enlighten citizens and free them from submission to the harmful teachings of the Church.[125] This included creating and perfecting the types of specialised instruction that were required for different professions and occupations, as well as promoting physical education.[126] The most important part of education, however, was instilling a love of justice and public utility in the citizenry through the diffusion of what Helvétius described as the "true principles of morality." These were simple and few in number, he claimed, and they were that "pain and pleasure are the only movers of the moral universe" and that "the sentiment of self-love is the only basis on which we can place the foundations of a useful morality."[127] For Helvétius, those principles were "the only true religion," and they should be "engraved" in the minds of children through a "moral catechism." By re-founding public education in this way, he suggested, it would be possible to supplant the traditional authority of the Church and encourage, as he described it, the union of "temporal and spiritual powers."[128]

Like Mirabeau and Le Mercier, Helvétius presented the diffusion of moral principles as a process of conversion and implicitly drew inspiration from religious instruction. While the Physiocrats promoted a moral doctrine that aligned with Christian faith, however, Helvétius sought to reduce human morality to the principles of physical sensibility and self-love, and he presented these principles as antithetical to the doctrine of the Church, whose authority needed to be curtailed.[129] Mirabeau and Le Mercier also described the inculcation of physiocratic precepts as a process of recovery, either of the knowledge humans had possessed in the first stage of society or of the

[125] Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 2:73-82 (on the corrupting effects of ignorance), 2:406-09 (on the advantages of public over domestic education), 1:36-42 (on the harmful teachings of the Church).
[126] Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 2:409-10. On the need for specialised forms of instruction, see *De l'Esprit*, 635.
[127] Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 230.
[128] Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 1:53-57, 93, 2:418.
[129] Helvétius argued that the power of the Church should be curtailed through religious toleration, as this would allow the coexistence of multiple faiths and thereby weaken the authority of any single one of them. Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 2:374-80.

natural light individuals had access to through *évidence*. For Helvétius, this process instead involved the convergence of minds around the simple and uniform principles, or facts, towards which moral science had historically advanced. The ideal Helvétius promoted in his works did not, therefore, simply look to the union of individual and collective interests. It also sought to bring into line the capacity for individual perfectibility with the collective progress of the science of morality.

Further to this, the impulse that underpinned Helvétius' conception of perfectibility, the human need to be in constant motion, also worked against the economic presuppositions of Quesnay's system. Indeed, physiocracy was a transitional programme with a defined end-state: the ideal of a happy and prosperous agricultural kingdom.[130] If, as Helvétius supposed, individuals had a ceaseless desire for new impressions, however, this ideal was a mirage. Happiness, Helvétius maintained in *De l'homme*, required being able to fill "the infinity of separate instants" that comprised human life in a manner that was "equally pleasant." To experience this, he claimed, individuals needed to engage in continuous, moderate activity to meet their needs and be neither idle nor overburdened. What Helvétius described as the "prodigy of universal felicity" was not therefore contingent on maximising agricultural production, as the Physiocrats suggested. It required a political economy in which every citizen could own "some property," live with "some ease" and, "by seven- or eight-hours labour, abundantly satisfy his needs and those of his family." "Without being equal in wealth or power," Helvétius insisted, individuals would thus be "equal in happiness."[131] In place of iniquitous forms of luxury, but also in contradistinction with

[130] I borrow the description of physiocracy as a "transitional programme" from Michael Sonenscher, "French Economists and Bernese Agrarians: The Marquis de Mirabeau and the Economic Society of Berne," *History of European Ideas* 33, no. 4 (2007): 426.
[131] Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 2:199-205. "La condition de l'ouvrier qui, par un travail modéré, pourvoit à ses besoins et à ceux de sa famille est de toutes les conditions peut-être la plus heureuse. Le besoin, qui nécessite son esprit à l'application, son corps à l'exercice, est un préservatif contre l'ennui et les maladies. Or, l'ennui et les maladies sont des maux, la joie et la santé des biens." *De l'homme*, 2:260, (b).

physiocracy, Helvétius therefore promoted the ideal of a uniform distribution of pleasures through the advent of an industrious society.[132]

Helvétius ended his works with perorations to the power of education and the art of the legislator. He was nonetheless despondent about the prospects for reform of the French monarchy.[133] It was also unclear, in his view, whether any government could escape the cycle of rise and fall afflicting societies with unequal distributions of wealth, in line with Rousseau's diagnosis. This reflected, at least in part, the restlessness of human desires. Perfectibility was "an indefinite quality," according to Charles-George Le Roy, a contributor to the *Encyclopédie* who had taken the defence of Helvétius after *De l'Esprit* was condemned and banned by public authorities. The human need for new impressions, Le Roy also suggested following Helvétius, produced "a progression of desires which… project themselves to infinity."[134] If this was the case, human perfectibility could be the source of improvements, in the arts and sciences, as well as in morality and politics, and it could further collective happiness. Since it was driven by the need for constant motion, however, it would inevitably undermine the stability of any society, even one characterised by the convergence of individual interests and the equality of pleasures.

Whatever his outlook on the future may have been, Helvétius' critique of modern states paralleled and resonated with Rousseau's. Like his counterpart, Helvétius was a virulent critic of the vices and inequities of eighteenth-century European societies. He also highlighted the corrupting effects of political representation in large polities, and he promoted the virtues of small, republican states.[135] Whereas Rousseau emphasised the need to attune society to human

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[132] Helvétius described this society as one that would enjoy "national" rather than private luxury. *De l'homme*, 2:85.
[133] In the preface to *De l'homme*, Helvétius lamented that France had fallen under the "yoke of despotism" and that its political ills were now incurable.
[134] Charles-George Le Roy, *Lettres philosophiques sur l'intelligence et la perfectibilité des animaux avec quelques lettres sur l'homme* [1768], 2nd ed. (Paris, 1802), 89, 175.
[135] He praised, like Rousseau, the idea of federal republican government, though he suggested, unlike Rousseau, that large states like France could be subdivided to establish such a system. Helvétius, *De l'homme*, 2:445. For his critique of political representation, see *De l'homme*, 2:99-103.

nature, however, Helvétius proposed attuning human nature to society. The art of the legislator, in his view, was nothing other than the refashioning of individual minds and conduct.[136] Although he has sometimes been seen as a democrat, because of his commitment to human equality, he has also been condemned for his apparent disregard for individual liberty and for paving the way for the evils of modern utilitarianism.[137] Notwithstanding these interpretations, Helvétius provided a compelling alternative in his time to reform project of the Physiocrats, one which, drawing on the science of man, was premised on the universal and uniform potential for human perfectibility.[138] This was not the only approach, however, that would shape the search for a science of society in late eighteenth-century France.

D'Holbach and the System of Nature

Paul-Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach, like Helvétius, was a member of the social and intellectual elite in France in the second half of the eighteenth century. Born in the Palatinate, he studied law in Leyden before moving to Paris in the late 1740s. Bequeathed a vast fortune, he held a regular *salon* from the 1750s to the 1780s, hosting many Enlightenment luminaries.[139] Over this period, d'Holbach wrote articles for Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* in fields ranging from chemistry to history, and he translated scientific and philosophical texts from German and English. In the tightened state of censorship that followed the backlash against Helvétius' *De l'Esprit*, as well as the withdrawal of the royal privilege of the *Encyclopédie* in 1759, d'Holbach also penned a series of works attacking the Church, published anonymously or under a pseudonym.

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136 "Similar to the sculptor who, from the trunk of a tree, can make a God or a bench," he wrote, "the legislator forms, at his will, heroes, geniuses and virtuous people." Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 220.
137 For classic iterations of these divergent interpretations, see Irving Louis Horowitz, *Claude Helvétius: Philosopher of Democracy and Enlightenment* (New York: Paine-Whitman, 1954); Isaiah Berlin, "Helvétius" (originally broadcast on BBC radio, 1952), in *Freedom and its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 11-27.
138 For one scholar, Helvétius' entire philosophy derived from his conception of perfectibility. Jean Dagen, *L'histoire de l'esprit humain dans la pensée française de Fontenelle à Condorcet* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977), 478.
139 On d'Holbach and his circle, see Pierre Naville, *D'Holbach et la philosophie scientifique au XVIIIe siècle*, new ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1967); Alan Charles Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

These culminated in *Système de la nature* (1770), a work that d'Holbach is thought to have written with the help of Diderot, and in which he virulently denounced all religious systems and rejected the idea of God. It was also in this work that he developed the principles of a moral philosophy predicated on the self-organising properties of matter.

In a similar way to Helvétius, d'Holbach maintained that there was no metaphysical difference between mind and body. "Man," as he put it in *Système de la nature*, "is a purely physical being," and his moral and intellectual attributes were only "this physical being considered from a certain point of view."[140] Unlike Helvétius, d'Holbach explicitly based his science of man on a vitalist cosmology of nature. Nature was "an acting, living whole," he argued, and it was permeated by immanent, purposive forces. These forces operated in different ways at different levels, according to d'Holbach, and in living beings they manifested themselves in a desire for conservation which he called "self-gravitation." In humans this desire was expressed as a "desire for happiness," a "love of well-being and pleasure" and "a marked aversion to all that disturbs their happiness or menaces their existence." D'Holbach described these as "primitive sentiments" which were "common to all beings of the human species," which "all their faculties are striving to satisfy" and which "all their passions, their wills and their actions have continually as their object and their end."[141] For d'Holbach, human beings were thus compelled – by force of nature – to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Like Helvétius, d'Holbach conceived of humans as pleasure-seeking creatures, without spiritual or immaterial attributes. He also similarly reduced the operations of the human mind to physical

[140] [D'Holbach], *Système de la nature, ou Des loix du monde physique et du monde moral*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London, 1775), 1:16.
[141] D'Holbach, *Système de la nature*, 1:28-29, 65-66, 71. On eighteenth-century vitalism, see Roselyne Rey, *Naissance et développement du vitalisme en France de la deuxième moitié du 18e siècle à la fin du Premier Empire* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000); Peter Hanns Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); John H. Zammito, "French Vital Materialism," chap. 4 in *The Gestation of German Biology: Philosophy and Physiology from Stahl to Schelling* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

sensibility, instating that sensibility was the source of all intellectual and moral faculties.[142] In contrast to Helvétius, however, d'Holbach insisted that physical differences played an important role in determining the capacities and attributes of individuals. This line of argument built on the critique of Helvétius developed by Diderot, who argued that variations in individual intellect could be brought back to variations in temperament, age and health, among other factors. Diderot, it is well known, had a close interest in contemporary ideas of physiology and medicine, and he was familiar with the works of Montpellier physicians in particular.[143] In his critique of *De l'Esprit*, Diderot praised Helvétius for striking "a furious blow to all kinds of prejudice" but insisted that he had overlooked the effects of physical organisation and had therefore overstated the powers of education.[144] As Diderot remarked in his rebuttal of *De l'homme*, there were natural limits to an individual's intellectual abilities, such as was the case, he claimed, with women. "Education can do a lot," he declared, "but it does not and cannot do everything."[145]

D'Holbach advanced a similar view. But while Diderot built on the ideas of Montpellier physicians, d'Holbach developed an account of human variability based on a reinterpretation of Leibnizian metaphysics. With reference to "the profound and subtle Leibniz," he argued that:

> … there are no two individuals of the human species who have exactly the same traits, who sense in precisely the same manner, who think in a uniform way, who see through the same eyes, who have the same ideas or by consequence the same system of conduct.[146]

This divergence was the source, he explained, of the "striking diversity" of human minds, faculties, tastes and opinions. It was also, according to d'Holbach, the foundation for "the

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[142] D'Holbach, *Système de la nature*, 1:146.
[143] On Diderot's reappropriation of Montpellier medicine and its broader context, see Charles T. Wolfe, *La philosophie de la biologie avant la biologie. Une histoire du vitalisme* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019). On the links between medical thought and philosophical materialism more generally, see Pascal Charbonnat, *Naissance de la biologie et matérialisme des Lumières* (Paris: Kimé, 2014).
[144] Diderot, "Réflexions sur le livre de l'Esprit par M. Helvétius," 274.
[145] Diderot, "Réfutation suivie de l'ouvrage d'Helvétius intitulé de l'Homme" (1783-1786), *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, 2:455.
[146] D'Holbach, *Système de la nature*, 1:138-39, 44, n. 8 (on Leibniz). On Enlightenment views of human diversity, see Henry Vyverberg, *Human Nature, Cultural Diversity, and the French Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

harmony that maintains and conserves the human race." In a materialist reinterpretation of Leibniz, he proposed that the natural variation, or inequality, of individual experience was the source of human sociability and it provided the key to collective happiness, since "the weak" sought protection from "the strong," while the latter relied on "the knowledge, talents and industry of the weak." For d'Holbach, the inequality of which contemporaries often complained was "the support of society," not the agent of its ruin, and every individual's "true interests" lay in the reciprocal assistance society could afford.[147] It was inequality not equality, he suggested, that provided the true cement of the social order.

D'Holbach's "system of nature" informed his model of social improvement. This model, which he set out in a series of works in the 1770s, presumed a human capacity for individual perfectibility. "It is evident," he argued in *Essai sur les préjugés* (1770), "that nature has made man capable of experience and, consequently, more and more perfectible." This capacity was "an eternal law pushing him forward," he claimed, and it was thus crucial to realising the harmony of the social order.[148] According to d'Holbach, the corruption, misery and conflict afflicting contemporary societies all originated in human ignorance and, especially, in ignorance of the "true principles" of morality and politics. In line with his natural philosophy, he argued that these simple and universal principles were that the pursuit of happiness was the foundation of morality, that individuals had mutual and complementary interests and that it was the responsibility of government to further collective well-being. D'Holbach insisted that "ministers of religion" had nonetheless misled societies for centuries and propagated beliefs and values antithetical "to reason, science and truth." In his view, therefore, the remedy for social ills lay in

[147] D'Holbach, *Système de la nature*, 1:138-40, 352.
[148] [D'Holbach], *Essai sur les préjugés, ou De l'influence des opinions sur les mœurs et sur le bonheur des hommes* (London, 1770), 97.

the destruction of the prejudices of religion and superstition and the enlightenment of citizens about their true interests through public education.[149]

D'Holbach thus followed Helvétius in linking social happiness to the diffusion of simple and uniform moral principles.[150] He also similarly suggested that it was in the interests of society to encourage a more equitable distribution of wealth and to make it possible for every citizen to meet their needs through moderate work.[151] Unlike Helvétius, however, d'Holbach argued that social harmony did not so much require the level distribution of pleasure, as the proper distribution of rank and function in society. The "subordination" of particular classes of citizens to others was "just and reasonable," he claimed in *Système social* (1773), because it reflected the natural divergence of human capacities. The authority and superiority of "big over small, rich over poor, fathers over their children, husbands over wives and masters over servants" was nonetheless legitimate, according to d'Holbach, only to the extent that those in in superior positions protected or looked after those under their tutelage. Without this provision, he insisted, society would be ruled by "tyrants and oppressors."[152] For d'Holbach, social inequality was just only if it aligned with the collective good.

These views had important implications for d'Holbach's approach to public education and, more generally, for his conception of human perfectibility. While he promoted the diffusion of a uniform system of morality, he also emphasised the need to attune instruction to the varied responsibilities of different classes in society. Education should "shape body, heart and mind," he argued, but it did not have the same purpose in every child:

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[149] D'Holbach, *Essai sur les préjugés*, 9-10, 46-50, 350.
[150] Like Helvétius, he would evoke the idea of inculcating those principles through a "moral catechism," or what he also called a "social code." [D'Holbach], *Éthocratie, ou Le gouvernement fondé sur la morale* (Amsterdam, 1776), 191.
[151] [D'Holbach], *Politique naturelle, ou Discours sur les vrais principes du gouvernement*, 2 vols. (London, 1773), 2:152.
[152] [D'Holbach], *Système social, ou Principes naturels de la morale et de la politique*, 3 vols. (London, 1773), 1:204-07.

> Education should teach princes how to rule, the great how to distinguish themselves by their merits and their virtues, the rich how to make good use of their wealth and the poor, how to subsist by an honest industry.[153]

Women, he added further on, should be taught the virtues that were required for their role in society: "domestic care and the education of their children."[154] Unlike Helvétius, therefore, and *contra* Jonathan Israel's depiction of a unitary and homogenous Radical Enlightenment, d'Holbach gave greater priority to cultivating the variegated skills and talents required to uphold what he described as the "hierarchical order in society."[155] Following this view, the human capacity for perfectibility was neither uniform nor universal. While collective improvements in knowledge may reflect the workings of an "eternal law," as d'Holbach described it, perfectibility at an individual level was variegated and variable.

D'Holbach also diverged from Helvétius' political philosophy, and he diverged from his evaluation of representation in particular. Although he argued that sharing political power more widely had benefits, as it had in ancient republics, Helvétius insisted that elected officials in large states tended to abuse their authority and that representation often paved the way to despotism.[156] D'Holbach, in contrast, maintained that political society was founded on a tacit pact between its members, who, despite the inequality of rank and function, had an equal right to liberty, property and security.[157] In the *Encyclopédie* article "Représentans" (1765), sometimes attributed to Diderot, d'Holbach also argued that political representation lessened the antagonism between different social classes and it made possible "a just equilibrium" between them.[158] In *La Politique naturelle* (1773), he built on this view and suggested that, although there

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153 D'Holbach, *Système social*, 3:117.
154 D'Holbach, *Système social*, 3:127.
155 D'Holbach, *Essai sur les préjugés*, 377. Israel maintains that human equality, including sexual equality, was one of the basic principles of the Radical Enlightenment. For just one iteration of this claim, see Israel, *Revolution of the Mind*, vii-viii.
156 Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 407; *De l'homme*, 2:99-103.
157 D'Holbach, *Politique naturelle*, 1:125. On d'Holbach as a social-contract theorist, see Charles Devellennes, "A Fourth Musketeer of Social Contract Theory: The Political Thought of the Baron d'Holbach," *History of Political Thought* 34, no. 3 (2013): 459-78.
158 [D'Holbach], "Représentans," *Encyclopédie* (1765), 14:143-46.

was no perfect form of government, the best way of preventing tyranny was to ensure that sovereign power "always remained subordinated to the power of the people's representatives" and that those representatives were subject, in turn, to "the will of their constituents." The reign of what he called here a "general will led by reason" nonetheless necessitated the education of citizens. Public enlightenment was therefore the condition not only for social harmony, but also for a just and balanced political life.[159]

Condorcet was inspired by these ideas, and he publicised them during the French Revolution. In *Bibliothèque de l'homme public* (1790), Condorcet praised d'Holbach's *La Politique naturelle* (though he did not reveal the name of its author) and insisted that it was one of the works "best suited to introduce minds to the revolution that is now regenerating France."[160] This appraisal arguably reflected the affinity between d'Holbach's moral and political philosophy and that of the Physiocrats, whose views shaped Condorcet's early thought. Like the followers of Quesnay, d'Holbach invoked the idea of a natural order and, despite his emphasis on social hierarchy, was a prominent advocate of equal rights.[161] Unlike the Physiocrats, however, d'Holbach did not conceive of social reform as a process of recovery, nor did he promote the ideal of an agricultural kingdom. Instead, he presented collective improvement as a condition of public enlightenment and general, if variegated, human perfectibility. The path to social happiness, he nonetheless admitted in *Système social*, was circuitous and it would be "the work of centuries, of the continuous efforts of the human mind and of repeated social experiments."[162] This future-

[159] D'Holbach, *Politique naturelle*, 73.
[160] "L'ouvrage dont nous parlons est un de ceux que nous croyons le plus faits pour préparer les esprits à la révolution qui régénère la France." Condorcet, "La Politique naturelle, ou Discours sur les vrais principes du gouvernement," *Bibliothèque de l'homme public* 6 (1790): 62. Jonathan Israel mistranslates this passage, suggesting that Condorcet believed d'Holbach's work as having "prepared minds" for the Revolution prior to its outbreak; Israel, *Enlightenment That Failed*, 209.
[161] On the influence of the Physiocrats' theory of natural rights on d'Holbach, see Edelstein, *Spirit of Rights*, 87-89.
[162] D'Holbach, *Système social*, 303.

oriented vision of human improvement was arguably closer to the one outlined in Condorcet's *Esquisse* than anything Quesnay or Mirabeau ever wrote.

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Neither of the models of improvement developed by Helvétius and d'Holbach amounted to a script for revolution.[163] Both, however, provided conceptual resources to the search for a science of society after the fall of the Bastille. They did so, in part, because they supplied accounts of human nature couched in the language of sensationist psychology and the science of man, and they set out a series of proposals for bettering society and government that looked to further, rather than reverse, the perfected state of knowledge of modern society. They would also shape early French social science because they envisioned societies free from subordination to traditional orders, and free from the authority of the Church in particular. While Helvétius emphasised the need to institute a new moral order predicated on the uniformity of human experience, d'Holbach stressed the potential for harmony of individuals' naturally unequal talents and capacities. Both of these models presupposed a human capacity for perfectibility, and they called on reformers to harness this capacity to advance the common good. In developing their moral and political philosophies, Helvétius and d'Holbach thus contributed to writing Rousseau out of his own concept. They also gestured towards the possibility of a science of society without physiocracy and, more controversially, towards a society without Christianity.

[163] On the notion of a script for revolution, see Keith M. Baker, "A script for a French Revolution: The Political Consciousness of the abbé Mably," chap. 4 in *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

2 – Social Science in the French Revolution: Sieyès and Condorcet

The search for a science of society in eighteenth-century France was driven by the ongoing difficulties of the monarchy in reforming public finances and the repeated political crises that ensued. The Physiocrats, who hoped to stabilise the French state and economy, were able to shape certain aspects of government policy in the 1760s and early 1770s. The downfall of Turgot's administration in 1776 nevertheless eroded faith in the ideal of enlightened monarchy favoured by those reformers. New momentum in the search for a science of society was then given by a young mathematician, Nicolas de Condorcet. Close to Turgot, Condorcet supported the proposals for political regeneration and educational reform outlined in the *Mémoire sur les municipalités* (1775), and he promoted the preservation of the natural rights of individual liberty and property, in line with the Physiocrats. He was nonetheless a virulent critic of the Church and had affinities with the more secular philosophies of Helvétius and d'Holbach, discussed in the previous chapter. More originally, Condorcet developed a new approach to the science of society in which the epistemological bedrock of physiocracy, the concept of "évidence," was replaced with a probabilistic theory of human knowledge and behaviour. It was by applying this theory, he claimed, that morality and politics would be able to reach the same level of certainty as the physical sciences.[164]

The other major innovation behind Condorcet's approach was his unwavering belief in the capacity for individual perfectibility. This belief was shaped by Turgot's own commitment to human perfectibility, but it also built on the rearticulation of the concept effected by Helvétius. In a similar fashion to the author of *De l'Esprit*, Condorcet maintained that perfectibility was a universal capacity with which all individuals and – significantly for his time – both sexes were endowed. He nonetheless added a crucial element to this concept. As previously discussed,

[164] Condorcet first articulated this view in his reception speech at the Académie française in 1782; see "Reception Speech at the French Academy," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Keith M. Baker (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1976).

Helvétius argued that the only reliable motive behind human conduct was self-interest. According to Condorcet, humans followed their interests, but they also had a natural ability to sympathise with the pain and suffering of others. This ability was the source of moral sentiments, he argued, and these were first acquired and developed in the family, the original site of human sociability. Condorcet maintained that individuals were therefore endowed with a capacity for intellectual *and* moral perfectibility, and that these were both indefinite in scope. This claim was at the heart of his social science, and it was the central argument of his most influential work, the *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, published posthumously in 1795.

Condorcet's approach to the science of society was not the only such project, however, to emerge in the late eighteenth century. The other main attempt to develop a science of this kind was undertaken by Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, the revolutionary theorist who was the first to employ the term *science sociale* after Mirabeau.[165] Sieyès, like Condorcet, wished to provide a reliable foundation to morality and politics, and his approach was similarly grounded in an analysis of individual capabilities. Whereas Condorcet promoted the idea of a "social mathematics" and emphasised the historical progress of knowledge and morality, Sieyès developed a metaphysics of the self and advanced a "science of the social order" centred on the benefits of an industrious society and a representative constitution. For Condorcet, human improvement involved cultivating the moral sentiments with which individuals were naturally endowed, and one of the main ways of achieving this was through education. For Sieyès, human happiness was a condition of functional differentiation, occupational specialisation and political institutions that made possible free and reciprocal exchange between its members. Condorcet

[165] Sieyès employed the term in the first edition of *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* published in January 1789.

promoted the convergence of individual capacities through the diffusion of knowledge; Sieyès advocated the harmonisation of human divergence through the division of labour.

These two models would shape subsequent attempts to construct a science of society in France. Following Condorcet, the concept of perfectibility and the reform of public education were central features of the social science of the Idéologues after the Terror. Saint-Simon, whom I examine in chapter four, turned against the concept of perfectibility, but he would draw heavily on one of Condorcet's other ideas: predicting the future based on the seemingly irreversible progress of human society. Sieyès' approach also had a significant impact on these thinkers. His metaphysics of the self inspired the scientific projects of the Idéologues, who extended and adapted his account of individual faculties in their works. Although Saint-Simon abandoned the political dimension of his thought, Sieyès' economic philosophy also informed the ideas Saint-Simon developed after the Restoration, and those of his followers in turn. As the focus shifted from individual to collective patterns of development, the search for a science of society in early nineteenth-century France would thus be shaped by visions of improvement that combined Condorcet's future-oriented philosophy of history with Sieyès' model of a society organised around the division of labour.

Both of the thinkers examined in this chapter have been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis. The divergence in their approaches has not, however, been sufficiently explored.[166] Condorcet has long been considered a key figure in early French social science, in part because of the reception of the *Esquisse*. Neglected for a time, Sieyès' thought has been the subject of a number of studies since the acquisition of his papers by the Archives nationales in 1967, and he

[166] Only two short studies have examined the similarities and differences in their approaches: Jacques Guilhaumou, "Condorcet-Sieyès: une amitié intellectuelle," in *Condorcet: Homme des Lumières et de la Révolution*, eds. Anne-Marie Chouillet and Pierre Crépel (Saint-Cloud: ENS Éditions, 1997), 223-39; Jean-Louis Morgenthaler, "Condorcet, Sieyès, Saint-Simon et Comte: Retour sur une anamorphose," *Socio-logos* (online) 2 (2007), https://doi.org/10.4000/socio-logos.373.

has come to be seen as one of the central theorists of the modern representative state.[167] This chapter provides a new window into each of their works, and the relationship between them, by examining the distinct models of improvement they developed in the late eighteenth century. I adapt Michael Sonenscher's typology of perfectibility theories to bring to light the hitherto unexamined distinction between Condorcet and Sieyès' models. Whereas Condorcet promoted the convergence of individual capacities, through the diffusion of the simple notions and sentiments in the grasp of every human being, Sieyès focused on harmonising the divergence of those capacities through the development of the division of labour and its extension to the realm of government.[168]

Drawing on the philosophies of Helvétius and d'Holbach among others, Sieyès and Condorcet both sought to articulate alternatives to physiocracy in the late eighteenth century. Although they were allies in the French Revolution and they collaborated on several projects, they conceived of society and politics in different ways.[169] In the first section of this chapter, I outline the nature of this divergence by exploring their distinct conceptions of the general will, juxtaposing these to the earlier conceptions of Rousseau and Diderot. I then consider their social scientific projects in turn. In section two, I outline the metaphysics of self that formed the basis of Sieyès' science of the social order, before detailing the innovative, and sometimes intricate, proposals for constitutional reform he put forward during the Revolution. Turning to Condorcet, in section three, I reconstruct his conception of human perfectibility through an analysis of manuscript

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[167] On Condorcet, see Baker, *Condorcet*; Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); David Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On Sieyès, see Murray Forsyth *Reason and Revolution: The Political Thought of the Abbé Sieyés* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987); William H. Sewell, *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbé Sieyès and What Is the Third Estate?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Pasquale Pasquino*, Sieyès et l'invention de la constitution en France* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998); Jacques Guilhaumou, *Sieyès et l'ordre de la langue: l'invention de la politique moderne* (Paris : Kimé, 2002); Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*; Pierre-Yves Quiviger, *Le principe d'immanence: Métaphysique et droit administratif chez Sieyès* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008).

[168] As previously mentioned, Michael Sonenscher develops the distinction, in his own work, between convergence and divergence-oriented conceptions of perfectibility to differentiate between Condorcet's approach and that of the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel; "Sociability, Perfectibility and the Intellectual Legacy of Rousseau."

[169] Sieyès and Condorcet notably collaborated in editing the short-lived publication *Journal d'instruction sociale* (1793).

texts surrounding the *Esquisse*, and then investigate the principles of his educational philosophy and social mathematics. I return to the *Esquisse* at the end of this chapter and uncover the original vision of human improvement he set forth in this work.

Social Science and the Politics of the General Will

The Search for Political Legitimacy

The French Revolution, it is well known, grew out of the financial crisis of the French state but was driven by a variety of social and political forces. The question of which of these forces was the most salient, and how they overlapped and fed into each other, has been the source of lengthy historiographical debate. Whatever its causes, however, historians agree that, following the first calling of the Estates General since 1614, French reformers had no clear and obvious model to follow to resolve the crisis they faced.[170] The American Revolution was a source of inspiration to a number of reformers, but they were cognisant of the differences between France and North America and, thus, of the limited applicability of its political and constitutional models. Although some looked to Britain, most considered its parliamentary system corrupt and the level of British public debt, a precursor to the death of the state.[171] Finally, a range of reformers looked to classical times, but many, including Sieyès and Condorcet, emphasised the distinct features of modern life and therefore the futility of any attempt to replicate the Ancients.[172] It was in this context that the search for a science of society became a source of debate and discussion in the early years of the French Revolution.

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[170] For a recent account of the early months of the Revolution, see Robert H. Blackman, *1789: The French Revolution Begins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). On the historiographical debate on how to interpret the French Revolution, see, most recently, "The French Revolution is Not Over," ed. Jack R. Censer, Special Forum, *Journal of Social History* 52, n. 3 (2019).

[171] Michael Sonenscher, "The Nation's Debt and the Birth of the Modern Republic: The French Fiscal Deficit and the Politics of the Revolution Of 1789. Part 1," *History of Political Thought* 18, no. 1 (1997): 64-103. For the classic account of the impact of the American revolution on French and other late eighteenth-century revolutionary movements, see R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959-64).

[172] On the influence of the Ancients, see Harold Talbot Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French revolutionaries. A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937); Claude Mossé,

Condorcet and Sieyès had both long been concerned with the need to reform the French monarchy. Condorcet, a mathematician by training, moved into Enlightenment society in the 1760s on the back of his precocious talent. Elected to the Académie royale des sciences in 1769, he became close to Turgot and, inspired by the Physiocrats, developed an interest in economic issues.[173] After the fall of Turgot's administration, Condorcet turned his attention to developing a probabilistic science of human knowledge and conduct, and he published works which developed this science and outlined his approach to the moral and political regeneration of the French state.[174] Sieyès, for his part, chose a career in the clergy, despite his personal misgivings about religion, and was ordained a priest in the early 1770s. Alongside his clerical duties, he devoted himself to the study of philosophical ideas and penned lengthy manuscript commentaries on eighteenth-century sensationist psychology and metaphysics, as well as critical analyses of the political economy of the Physiocrats. It was in this period of self-focused reflection that he began to articulate the foundations of his social science.[175]

Following the outbreak of the Revolution, Condorcet and Sieyès promoted the project of a science of society, both independently and together. Sieyès linked the arguments of his most influential work, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* (1789), to the principles of "the science of the social order," or what he called in the first edition of the text, "social science" (*la science sociale*). The principles of this science, as I discuss in further detail below, were the basis for his claim that the Third Estate were the only rightful members of the nation, and that the orders of the nobility

L'Antiquité dans la Révolution française (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989); Keith M. Baker, "Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France," *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 1 (March 2001): 32-53; Ariane Viktoria Fichtl, *La radicalisation de l'idéal républicain: Modèles antiques et la Révolution française* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021).

[173] On his early engagement with physiocracy, see Jean-Claude Gaudebout, "L'influence de la pensée physiocratique dans les écrits pré-révolutionnaires de Condorcet," (PhD diss., Université de Nanterre - Paris X, 2019).

[174] On Condorcet's life, see Williams, "Profile of a Political Life," chap. 1 in *Condorcet and Modernity*.

[175] For these aspects of Sieyès' biography, I rely on Sewell, *Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution*, 8-15. Although he typically avoided discussion of religion in his works, Sieyès outlined the idea of a natural and "sentimental" religion in one of his later manuscript notes. Jacques Guilhaumou, "Fragments d'un discours sur Dieu," in *Mélanges Michel Vovelle: Sur la Révolution, approches plurielles*, ed. Jean Paul Bertaud (Paris: Société des études robespierristes, 1997), 257-65.

and the clergy had no legitimacy.[176] In 1790, Sieyès joined forces with Condorcet and others to found the *Société de 1789*, a political club devoted to the development and diffusion of social science as a way of furthering national "felicity" and the principles of a "free constitution."[177] Justifying the objectives of the club, Condorcet maintained that the "social art" – employing the term earlier popularised by the Physiocrats – was "a true science founded, like other sciences, on facts, experiment, reasoning and calculation." This new branch of knowledge nonetheless needed to be developed, he argued, and it called for "a society of men" to occupy itself with "accelerating" its progress, "hastening its development and disseminating its truths."[178]

One of the central issues in the search for a science of society in the early years of the French Revolution was how to combine, in a just and orderly way, the collective wishes, interests and desires of a large and diverse citizenry. The events of 1789 were famously defined by the call to restore the sovereignty of the nation and the associated invocation to base political decisions on the "general" or "common" will.[179] How to meet those calls gave rise to a lengthy, protracted debate between revolutionary reformers that spanned the course of the entire 1790s. Sieyès and Condorcet each made important contributions to this debate. Aligned with the *parti patriote*, they both sought a middle path between the more moderate agenda of those who sought to preserve the sovereign power of the King, and those who called for the people's direct participation in politics. They nonetheless developed different ways of thinking about the legitimacy of the general will, and they disagreed over the obligation of citizens to submit to the decisions of the

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[176] [Sieyès], *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* 3rd ed. (N.p., 1789), 60. On his use of the term *science sociale* and its place in his moral and political thought, see Michael Sonenscher's introduction in Sieyès, *Political Writings, including the Debate between Sieyès and Tom Paine in 1791*, ed. and trans. Michael Sonenscher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), esp. vii-xxii.
[177] [Sieyès], *Ébauche d'un nouveau plan de Société patriotique* (N. p., 1790; *Réglemens de la société de 1789 et liste de ses membres* (Paris, 1790). On this club, see Keith M. Baker, "Politics and Social Science in Eighteenth-Century France: The Société de 1789," in *French Government and Society 1500-1850: Essays in Memory of Alfred Cobban*, eds. Alfred Cobban and J. F Bosher (London: Athlone Press, 1973), 203-30; Mark Olsen, "A Failure of Enlightened Politics in the French Revolution: The *Société de 1789*," *French Revolutionary Studies* vol. 6, no. 3 (September 1992): 303-34.
[178] Condorcet, "On the Society of 1789" [1790], in *Selected Writings*, 93.
[179] A variety of political actors, with different agendas, appealed to the principle of the "general will" throughout the course of the French Revolution, and elsewhere. For a recent examination of these uses, see Jeffrey Ryan Harris, "The Struggle for the General Will and the Making of the French and Haitian Revolutions" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2020).

political majority.[180] The ways in which they diverged reflected their distinct models of improvement.

The divergence in their views can best be measured by turning to a pamphlet written by Condorcet on the nature of political power published in November 1792, the arguments of which Sieyès would vigorously oppose. Condorcet opened this work by insisting that men had become so used to obeying other men that they had developed an imperfect understanding of liberty. Responding to the widespread claim that the general will, as expressed by the decisions taken on the basis of the majority opinion of French legislators, should command political obligation, Condorcet insisted that citizens were only bound to follow those decisions if they followed what he called "collective reason." According to Condorcet, political decisions were illegitimate if they oppressed a minority of citizens, violated individual rights or, as he put it, "evidently contradicted reason."[181] In the turbulent months that followed the deposition of the King, the September massacres and the institution of the first French Republic, Condorcet wanted to emphasise the limits of political power. He did so by suggesting that the legitimacy of political decisions should be evaluated, on the basis of universal principles of right, by an independent and enlightened citizenry.

Sieyès, who was acutely concerned with precision in language, opposed Condorcet's approach. "What is your intention," he asked, in marginal notes to his copy of the pamphlet, "do you wish to give a lesson to the legislator, or do you want to give the governed an enduring pretext to rise up?" "Does the legislator," he went on, "express the product of his reason in any other way than through his will, and do you want everyone, before obeying, to judge whether the law is the work

[180] Sieyès was cautious about the notions of popular or national sovereignty and rarely employed them, promoting instead the distinction between "constituent" and "constituted" power. Lucia Rubinelli, "How to Think beyond Sovereignty: On Sieyes and Constituent Power," *European Journal of Political Theory* 18, no. 1 (January 2019): 47-67; "Sieyès and the French Revolution," chap. 1 in *Constituent Power: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[181] Condorcet, "De la nature des pouvoirs politiques dans une nation libre" [1792], in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, eds. A. Condorcet O'Connor and M.F. Arago, vol. 10 (Paris, 1847), 589-90.

of reason, or of the will? Marat! Where are you?"[182] Comparing Condorcet's ideas to those of one of their political foes, Sieyès derided his distinction between collective reason and collective will. The ambiguity of the audience to which Condorcet was addressing his arguments compounded the absurdity and danger of this distinction, Sieyès suggested, and it paved the way to popular insurrection. In the conditions of political turmoil and unrest that characterised the early years of the French Revolution, especially following the fall of Louis XVI, Sieyès intimated that these arguments would incite the same spirit of revolt as Jean-Paul Marat's fiery radicalism.

Although Sieyès may have made the comments later in the 1790s, they pointed to the principles that underpinned his own conception of the general will.[183] In a modern polity, he claimed, the sole members of the political association were those who contributed through their work to collective prosperity, which excluded the "idle" class of the nobility. The size of a country like France, however, meant that the general will had to be expressed "by proxy" through representatives. According to Sieyès, they could do so only if certain procedures were in place. These included a graduated system of election, the separation of political functions and of powers and the ability for legislators to arrive at decisions through independent discussion, deliberation and majority vote.[184] Sieyès agreed with Condorcet that public authorities had to guarantee individual rights, but he did not suggest that citizens should evaluate political decisions on the basis of "collective reason." In his view, the legitimacy of those decisions, and thus the obligation they commanded, was a function of the procedural mechanisms by which those

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[182] Sieyès papers, Archives nationales, 284 AP/5, Dossier 2, folder 3, ff. 15. It is worth noting that this is one of only two texts in which Sieyès and Condorcet explicitly took issue with each other's approach. The other is a manuscript letter from July 1791 in which Condorcet outlined his divergent views on the question of the monarchy; republished in Guilhaumou, "Condorcet-Sieyès: une amitié intellectuelle," 235-39.

[183] The pamphlet with Sieyès' marginal notes is archived in a folder with the title "Notes concernant la Constitution de l'an VIII" (1799). Andrew Jainchill reads these notes as a evidence of the rejection by Sieyès of "any sense of individual political autonomy in a nation's political life." *Reimagining Politics After the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 222.

[184] Sieyès, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* 107-9, 149-50; *Vues sur les moyens d'exécution dont les représentants de la France pourront disposer en 1789*, 2nd ed. (N.p.: 1789), 21-22, 91-94; *Dire de l'abbé Sieyes sur la question du véto royal, à la séance du 7 Septembre 1789* (Versailles, 1789), 14-19.

decisions were made.[185] Political liberty, for Sieyès, was less a question of public enlightenment than of constitutional design.

The Legacies of Rousseau and Diderot

It is instructive to juxtapose Sieyès and Condorcet's argument to an earlier disagreement between Rousseau and Diderot on the concept of the general will.[186] This disagreement touched on several of the same issues, but it underscores the extent to which Sieyès and Condorcet reconfigured earlier moral and philosophical ideas. In a series of recent articles, Michael Sonenscher has uncovered the Rousseauian origins of the search for a science of society in France, highlighting the links between Rousseau's critique of modern natural law and Sieyès' political thought.[187] This search was also shaped in crucial ways by Rousseau's critics, however, who, as I discussed in chapter one, supplied different ways of thinking about the relationship between society and politics. I trace the legacies of their arguments in more detail when I examine Sieyès and Condorcet's social scientific projects in further detail below. The juxtaposition with Rousseau and Diderot here serves to elucidate the intellectual origins of the moral and political principles at the heart of those projects. It also elaborates the distinction, suggested by Keith Baker, between a discourse of will and a discourse of reason during the French Revolution.[188]

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[185] Despite his contribution to the Declaration of Rights of 1789, Sieyès had an aversion to the enumerative style of such declarations, which he described as an American fashion; see his remarks in *Préliminaire de la Constitution. Reconnoissance et exposition raisonnée des droits de l'homme et du citoyen. Lu les 20 et 21 juillet 1789, au Comité de Constitution* (Paris, 1789), 41, n. 1. Sieyès also argued that such declarations were unnecessary once a political society was properly instituted; "Fragments politiques" and "Droits de l'homme," in *Des manuscrits de Sieyès*, ed. Christine Fauré, 2 vols. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999-2007), 1:462, 499. On his conception of the unity of action, see *Opinion de Sieyès, sur plusieurs articles des titres IV et V du projet de constitution* (Paris, 1795), 3-4, 9.

[186] I would like to thank Michael Sonenscher for pointing to the possible significance the row between Diderot and Rousseau in the genesis of Condorcet's political thought.

[187] On his reading, Rousseau's concept of the general will provided part of the inspiration behind Sieyès' social science, in so far it this science described the "meta-political body of knowledge that justified the idea of majority rule." Michael Sonenscher, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Foundations of Modern Political Thought," *Modern Intellectual History* 14, no. 2 (2017): 320; "Ideology, Social Science and General Facts," 28.

[188] Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, 26-27; "Political Languages of the French Revolution," in *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, 627-28.

The initial disagreement was prompted by Diderot's *Encyclopédie* article "Droit naturel," published in 1755. Adapting theological accounts of the concept, Diderot suggested in this piece that the "general will" derived from the "general and common interest" of the human species, and it was to be found in the variety of social customs, legal codes and moral norms behind all forms of human action. The "general will is always good" and "never erred," he maintained, and for every individual it was "a pure act of understanding" accessible through reason. On this basis, Diderot argued that the general will was the source for principles of natural right and that it should serve as a guide to individual conduct. Any person who followed their particular will, without regard for the general will, he maintained, could be considered "an enemy to the human race."[189] Although he did not develop the implications of these claims in this article, they informed the views he put forward in his later works. This included his critique of European imperialism and the institution of slavery, his support for the American Revolution – which he praised by drawing on the works of the English radical Thomas Paine – and his calls for sovereign power to be limited by consent of the people.[190]

Rousseau opposed this account of the general will and developed an alternative definition of the concept.[191] In the *Geneva manuscript*, an early draft of *Du contrat social* (1762), he argued that Diderot's account presumed the existence of a "general society of mankind," but that this was a

[189] Denis Diderot, "Droit naturel," in *Encyclopédie* (1755), 5:115-16. On earlier theological conceptions of the general will, see Patrick Riley, "The General Will before Rousseau: The Contributions of Arnauld, Pascal, Malebranche, Bayle, and Bossuet," in *The General Will: The Evolution of a Concept*, eds. James Farr and David Lay Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3-71. On the origins and use of the notion of an "enemy of the human race" in this period, see Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 30-32, 38-41, 154-58.
[190] Diderot, *Political Writings*, eds. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[191] This is despite Rousseau initially appearing to follow Diderot's approach. Robert Wokler, "The Influence of Diderot on the Political Theory of Rousseau: Two Aspects of a Relationship," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 132 (1975): 55-111. On Rousseau and Diderot's relationship, see also Marian Hobson, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Diderot in the Late 1740s: Satire, Friendship, and Freedom," in *Rousseau and Freedom*, eds. Christie McDonald and Stanley Hoffmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58-76; Céline Spector, "Rousseau and Diderot: Materialism and its Discontents," in *The Rousseauian Mind*, eds. Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly (London: Routledge, 2019), 107-18; Joanna Stalnaker, "Rousseau and Diderot," in *Thinking with Rousseau: From Machiavelli to Schmitt*, eds. Helena Rosenblatt and Paul Schweigert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 175-91.

philosophical abstraction. With reference to Hobbes, Rousseau insisted that states were, by definition, in a state of war with each other and that individuals derived their notions of right and duty not by consulting "the species in general," but from their "particular societies."[192] Building on these views, he argued in *Du contrat social* that the "general will" should be conceived as the product of the reciprocal union of individual citizens in the body of the state. For this reason, he claimed, the general will was not the source of universal principles of right, but rather the inalienable source of sovereign power. As long as proper procedures of deliberation were followed, Rousseau argued, the general will would unerringly express the common interest, and if someone refused to follow its orders they could be constrained to do so. This meant that they could, as he famously declared, "be forced to be free."[193]

From one perspective, Condorcet and Sieyès' approaches appeared to respectively align with those of Diderot and Rousseau. Following Diderot, Condorcet presented the legitimacy of political decisions as contingent upon their conformity with universal principles of right. He also suggested that those principles should guide human conduct, although his focus was the conduct of the general will, not that of individuals. Despite not usually referring to him in his works, Condorcet subscribed to a similar discourse of reason as Diderot.[194] Along with supporting the American Revolution and being a long-time abolitionist, Condorcet was personally close to Paine, who likely converted him into a proponent of republican government in the French Revolution.[195] Recalling Diderot, Condorcet also justified the 1792 French declaration of war by

[192] Rousseau, "Geneva Manuscript," in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, 155-58.
[193] On Rousseau on the general will, see Patrick Riley, "Rousseau's General Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124-53; David Lay Williams, "The Substantive Elements of Rousseau's General Will," in *The General Will: The Evolution of a Concept*, 219-46; Stanley Hoffmann, "*The Social Contract*, or the Mirage of the General Will," in *Rousseau and Freedom*, 113-41.
[194] In a manuscript note, unpublished in his time, Condorcet defended Diderot, who he likely met in the 1760s, against an attack by Jacques Mallet du Pan. Anne-Marie Chouillet and Jean-Nicolas Rieucau, "Une "Note" inédite de Condorcet sur Diderot," *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie* (online) 43 (October 2008), https://doi.org/10.4000/rde.3542.
[195] On the likely influence of Paine's notion of "common sense" on Condorcet's conception of the general will, see Kathleen McCrudden Illert, "Judging a Declaration: Condorcet, Rights and the General Will in 1789," *French History* (2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crab058.

denouncing noble *émigrés* and their supporters as "the enemy of the human race."[196] More tellingly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in the early 1790s Condorcet lauded the political ideas of the baron d'Holbach, Diderot's close collaborator, and heaped praise on *La Politique naturelle*, a work in which its author called for limiting sovereign power by a "general will led by reason." From this perspective, Condorcet's concept of "collective reason" can be interpreted as a rearticulation of Diderot's general will of mankind.

Sieyès, for his part, reiterated Rousseau's critique of appealing to universal moral principles to determine individual rights and duties. Sieyès, who shared a similarly Hobbesian view of political legitimacy, emphasised the national framework of legal and political decisions.[197] Following Rousseau, Sieyès thus defined the general will as the expression of the combined interests of citizens, so long as these were the equal members of the political association. Like Rousseau, Sieyès also conceived of the general will, not as the source of normative principles accessible through reason, as Diderot had suggested, or as one whose content ought to be evaluated by individual citizens, as Condorcet proposed, but as the product of specific and elaborate political procedures, which required technical precision and sophistication.[198] In a similar way to

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[196] Condorcet, "Projet d'une exposition des motifs qui ont déterminé l'Assemblée nationale à décréter, sur la proposition formelle du roi, qu'il y a lieu à déclarer la guerre au roi de Bohême et de Hongrie" [1792], in *Œuvres complètes de Condorcet*, eds. Sophie Grouchy, A. A. Barbier, P. G. Cabanis and D.J. Garat, vol. 16 (Brunswick, 1804), 280. On the history of the term "enemy of the human race," see Edelstein, *Terror of Natural Right*, 26-42. On Condorcet and Paine, see Carine Lounissi, "Paine and the Abolition of the French Monarchy," chap. 4 in *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). On Condorcet's critique of slavery, see Joseph Jurt, "Condorcet: l'idée de progrès et l'opposition à l'esclavage," in *Condorcet, mathématicien, économiste, philosophe, homme politique*, eds. Pierre Crépel and Christian Gilain (Paris: Minerve, 1989), 385-95.

[197] Sieyès, "Hobbes," in Pasquino, *Sieyès et l'invention de la constitution en France*, 165-66. On the Hobbesian foundations of Sieyès' political thought, see Istvan Hont, "The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind: "Nation-State" and "Nationalism" in Historical Perspective," chap. 7 in *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[198] Sieyès notably developed the system of graduated promotion Rousseau put forward in his proposals on the constitution of Poland. Sonenscher, "Introduction," lv-lvi. On the link between the two thinkers, see also Sonenscher, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 71-72. What's more, the famous opening lines of Sieyès' *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* appear to have drawn from a passage on this subject from Rousseau's work: "There you have, it seems to me, a rather well graduated progression for the essential and intermediate part of the whole, namely, the nobility and the magistrates; but we are still lacking the two extremes, namely, the people and the King. Let us begin with the first, *which until now has counted for nothing but which it is important finally to count for something* if one wants to give Poland a certain force, a certain stability." Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland* [1782], in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, 243 (emphasis added). This similarity has not, to my knowledge, been commented on by scholars until now.

Rousseau, finally, Sieyès presented the general will as providing the sublime unity of a just political society. It was the immanent, but metaphysical compound that supplied political legitimacy and obligation within a particular state, whatever its forms of government.[199]

From another perspective, the alignment went the other way, however. Although Sieyès shared aspects of Rousseau's discourse of the will, he was critical of revolutionary appeals to the sovereignty of the people and he argued that the general will, in a modern polity like France, could only be expressed through political representation. For Rousseau, representation was a sign of moral corruption and it foreshadowed the end of the state.[200] For Sieyès, the nature of modern societies, which were defined by occupational specialisation and more focused on the pursuit of riches than on virtue, meant that legitimate government was impossible without it.[201] In this respect, his approach was closer to Diderot's. As I discussed in chapter one, in the article "Représentans" (sometimes attributed to d'Holbach and sometimes to Diderot), political representation was described as a means of harmonising the interests of a diverse, interdependent society.[202] In the 1770s, around the time Sieyès turned his attention to questions of political economy, Diderot also promoted the benefits of commerce and industry in a work that included a pointed critique of physiocracy.[203] Sieyès, in this context, could be said to have

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[199] This was one reason why Sieyès opposed Paine and Condorcet's conception of republican government. See the public exchange between Sieyès and Paine, which took place shortly after the King's flight to Varennes, in Variétés, *Supplément à La gazette nationale, ou Le moniteur universel* 197 (16 July 1791); a translated version of this exchange can now be found in Sieyès, *Political Writings*, 163-73. On Condorcet's disagreement with Sieyès on this question, see Condorcet to Sieyès, in Guilhaumou, "Condorcet-Sieyès: une amitié intellectuelle," 235-39. For a different interpretation, see Stephanie Frank, "The General Will Beyond Rousseau: Sieyès' Theological Arguments for the Sovereignty of the Revolutionary National Assembly," *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 3 (2011): 337-43.
[200] Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 114.
[201] As Sieyès remarked, Rousseau maintained that the will could not be represented – but "why not?" he asked: "Il ne s'agit pas ici de la volonté entière de l'homme, et les exemples sont nombreux, de particuliers et de puissances, qui traitent sur tel ou tel point, par voie de procuration." "Bases de l'ordre social," *Manuscrits de Sieyès*, 1:510.
[202] The inspiration provided by Diderot and d'Holbach's political thought may be the reason why Sieyès, in one place, described the process of political "assimilation" required in representative government as akin to "a sort of *éthocratie*," employing the term d'Holbach had earlier introduced to describe the project of a morally based government. Sieyès, "Discussion sur la Constitution de l'an III," in *Manuscrits de Sieyès*, 2:544-45.
[203] Diderot, "Observations sur le Nakaz" [1774], in *Œuvres politiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1963) (this edition includes the article "Représentans"); Graham Clure, "Rousseau, Diderot and the Spirit of Catherine the Great's Reforms," *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 7 (2015): 883-908.

combined Rousseau's emphasis on constitutional design with Diderot's evaluation of modern political economy.

Condorcet, meanwhile, diverged from Rousseau's neo-Hobbesian theory of politics, yet he followed Rousseau's emphasis on individual moral independence. As Rousseau argued in *Du contrat social*, the general will could only be expressed when each citizen separately gave voice to the common interest, without communicating with one another. The rule of the general will, in this account, required citizens not only to be ethically bound to each other, but also sufficiently independent of mind to separate their interests from those of the political whole.[204] Condorcet was less emphatic than Rousseau about the need for patriotic allegiance to the state, but he was similarly concerned with the capacity for citizens to reach independent evaluations of the collective good. If Rousseau argued that those evaluations were internal to the expression of the general will, however, Condorcet insisted that they could provide an external check on power. Condorcet thus transformed Rousseau's injunction on the general will into a call for "the submission of the will of the people to reason." That is, "to force [the people], by enlightening them, not to bend before the law, but to want to submit to it."[205] In this way, Condorcet redefined the nature of political obligation and tied it to public enlightenment, the central axis of his model of human improvement.

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[204] Although he did not develop this aspect of his political philosophy in *Du contrat social*, in his other works Rousseau made clear that the institution of a civic form of education was crucial to the viability of a free polity. Rousseau, "Discourse on Political Economy" [1755], in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, 15-16, 20-23; *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, 189; Riley, *General Will before Rousseau*, 212. On the ambiguity of Rousseau's approach, however, see Edelstein, *Terror of Natural Right*, 75-82.

[205] Condorcet, "De la nature des pouvoirs politiques," 612. For a recent examination of the parallels between their political projects, see Guillaume Ansart, "Rousseau and Condorcet: Will, Reason and the Mathematics of Voting," *History of Political Thought* 41, no. 3 (Autumn 2020): 450-63. For a more detailed examination of Condorcet's theory of representative government, see Nadia Urbinati, "A Republic of Citizens: Condorcet's Indirect Democracy," chap. 6 in *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Minchul Kim, "Condorcet and the Viability of Democracy in Modern Republics, 1789-1794," *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (April 2019): 179-202.

The Science of Improvement

Sieyès and Condorcet each in different ways adapted the moral and political approaches earlier developed by Rousseau and Diderot.[206] Ultimately, however, they both diverged in a fundamental sense from their predecessors. Although he promoted various reforms in his time, Diderot subscribed to a cyclical view of political life and considered that societies were locked in "a regular circle" of progress and decline.[207] Rousseau, as discussed in the previous chapter, saw no potential for improvement in large modern states, and he thought that political reform was feasible only in a few limited settings. Neither Sieyès nor Condorcet was so dejected. In the space for political discussion and debate that opened up in 1789, they put forward ambitious plans to transform both state and society in France. They did so based on the belief that revolutionary reformers had the power to lead and inspire the regeneration of a modern polity, previously held back by the interests of privileged orders, the traditionalism of the Church and the unlimited authority of the monarch. Their respective conceptions of society and politics were therefore predicated on models of improvement that put them at odds with their predecessors' assessments of contemporary prospects for reform.

Although revolutionary events shaped the arguments Sieyès and Condorcet developed in the 1790s, they began to articulate their models of improvement before the French Revolution. They each did so as part of an attempt to construct a post-physiocratic social science. If they diverged on the politics of the general will, they also diverged on the nature and content of this science. As indicated by their disagreement over the foundations of political legitimacy, Sieyès would promote a science of society oriented towards the reform of economic and political institutions, and of the French constitution in particular. Condorcet, by contrast, developed an approach that

[206] This juxtaposition further underscores the limited purchase of Jonathan Israel's thesis. According to Israel, the political thought of Sieyès and Condorcet was the product of a "radical" wing of Enlightenment philosophy that included Diderot and d'Holbach, among others, but not Rousseau.
[207] Diderot, extracts from the *Histoire des Deux Indes* [1783], in *Political Writings*, 170, 207.

gave priority to the education of the citizenry, that is, to the perfectibility of individual minds. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine the origins and development of these two models of improvement in the context of Sieyès and Condorcet's respective attempts to forge a new social science, and I explore the ways in which they reconfigured the earlier projects of the Physiocrats and their contemporaries. In doing so, I outline two of the approaches that would shape, in crucial and defining ways, the search for a science of society in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century France.

The Science of the Social Order

A Novel Invention

Sieyès introduced the concept of a "science of the social order" in the series of pamphlets he published at the outbreak of the French Revolution. He argued in these works that this science – which he also sometimes called "social science," "the science of the state of society" and the science of the "social art" – provided the key to the reform of the French state, for it showed the course of action legislators should follow.[208] As mentioned above, Sieyès first referred to this science in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* to support the claim that the Third Estate were the only legitimate members of the nation. In *Vues sur les moyens d'exécution dont les représentants de la France pourront disposer en 1789*, published in May 1789, he suggested that the "fundamental principles of the social order" also pointed to the need for "a good constitution." This would be one, he argued, that could "give and guarantee citizens the enjoyment of their natural and social rights," "confer stability on everything that may be done for the good" and "progressively extinguish all that has been done for the bad."[209] For Sieyès, the science of the social order supported the

[208] Sieyès coined an even greater range of descriptors in his manuscript texts. He notably alluded in one place to the idea of writing a "treatise on socialism" that would encompass "the goal given by man to himself in society and of the means he has to attain it." Sieyès appears to have been the first to employ the term *socialisme* in France. Jacques Guilhaumou and Sonia Branca-Rosoff, "De "société" à "socialisme": l'invention néologique et son contexte discursif. Essai de colinguisme appliqué," *Langage et société* 83, no. 1 (1998): 39-77.
[209] Sieyès, *Views of the Executive Means Available to the Representatives of France in 1789* [1789], in *Political Writings*, 5. The pamphlet was written in July or August 1788 and it circulated in manuscript form, under a different title, until it was published in 1789. Sonenscher, introduction to Sieyès, *Political Writings*, xxii.

project of political emancipation of the French nation and of securing individual rights and the pursuit of the common good by means of a new constitution.

Sieyès promoted his science of society as an alternative to the search for legal and political principles in the annals of history. Drawing on earlier discussions of the origins of the French constitution, a range of thinkers in the early years of the French Revolution were appealing to the historical rights of the Gauls, the supposed ancestors of the modern nation, against the conquering Franks, the alleged forefathers of the French nobility.[210] Sieyès opposed those appeals to history. Reason, he maintained in *Vues sur les moyens d'exécution*, was of all time, and it was as ridiculous for the clockmaker to consult the history of clock making, as it was to look to "barbarous centuries" for the laws appropriate to "civilised nations."[211] The science of society was a novel invention, he also remarked in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* as it was "not the sort of thing that despots and aristocrats could have been expected to encourage." Revolutionary reformers should therefore not be discouraged to find little guidance from history; "for a long time," as he put it, "men built huts before they were able to build palaces."[212]

Sieyès also distinguished his approach from other recent attempts to construct a science of morality and politics. In a lengthy digression in *Vues sur les moyens d'exécution*, he admonished the "crude pedantry" of those who disparaged the project of going back "to the first principles of the social art." As he explained, eighteenth-century efforts to reduce morality and politics to human experience or to simple facts of the physical order, in the manner of the natural sciences, had nonetheless been misguided.[213] He therefore warned his contemporaries:

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[210] Marina Valensise, "The French Constitution in Prerevolutionary Debate," *The Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988): S22-57. For a broader examination of this trend, see Matthew d'Auria, "Debating the Nation's History," chap. 6 in *The Shaping of French National Identity: Narrating the Nation's Past, 1715-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[211] Sieyès, *Views of the Executive Means*, 4-5.
[212] Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?* [1789], in *Political Writings*, 133.
[213] "Unhappily, philosophers themselves, who during the course of this century have given such signal services to the physical sciences, appear to have set the stamp of their authority upon this absurd belief and seem to have lent the force of their genius to blind declamation. Rightly disgusted by the systematizing mania of their predecessors,

> Beware of the influence on your representatives' minds of the idea, disseminated all-too-widely by modern scholars, that morality, like physics, can be given a foundation based on experience. Men in this century have been restored to reason by way of the natural sciences. This has been a real service. But we must still beware of allowing a false sense of gratitude to confine us within a narrow circle of imitation and instead must make an unimpeded inquiry into the new instauration that awaits us at the journey's end. It is of course the case that genuine policy and genuine politics involve combinations of facts, not combinations of chimeras, but they still involve combinations.[214]

The natural sciences had provided valuable inspiration to the development of knowledge, Sieyès maintained, but their method was not suited to the study of human morality, nor could it supply the "combinations" required for political action. The legislator, he explained, was "like an architect" who developed the plans and designs that were "fit for a people." The science of the social order, according to Sieyès, was a creative form of knowledge concerned with establishing the legal and constitutional institutions of the state, and it should not aspire to replicate pre-existing models of nature or history.

Sieyès thus presented his science of society as a new and original way of conceptualising the organisation and regulation of a modern polity. He did so by casting aside the quest for the historical origins of the French constitution, as well as opposing naturalistic trends in eighteenth-century thought. Citing attempts to derive moral and political principles from the physical order and from experience, Sieyès specifically took issue with the approaches developed by the Physiocrats, on one hand, and by theorists, like Helvétius, who drew on the principles of the science of man.[215] The simple notions to which each of set of thinkers had reduced morality and politics, according to Sieyès, were insufficient to provide direction to the reform and regeneration of the French monarchy. If social science dealt with "combinations of facts," however, it was necessary to know what those facts were. Sieyès alluded to these in his

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they devoted themselves to the study of facts and proscribed every other method. In the area in question, this deserves nothing but praise. But in moving beyond the physical order and in recommending the use of this method in the moral order, they are mistaken." Sieyès, *Views of the Executive Means*, 15.

[214] Sieyès, *Views of the Executive Means*, 16.

[215] One of Quesnay's followers earlier suggested that the "plan of the social order" could be found "with the greatest precision" in the "physical order." [Jean-Nicolas-Marcellin Guérineau de Saint-Péravi], *De l'ordre des administrations provinciales déterminé par les loix physiques* (N.p: 1782), 3.

revolutionary works, but they were the product of a series of detailed reflections that he began to develop in the 1770s. Those reflections laid the conceptual foundations of his science of the social order and supplied the organising principles of the model of improvement he advanced during the French Revolution.

From Simple to Complex

In his revolutionary pamphlets, Sieyès justified his approach by appealing to the distinction between the study of facts, which he associated with the natural sciences, and the combination of those facts, which he presented as the method of social science. This distinction pointed to the principle underlying Sieyès' philosophy: the duality, in all realms of life, between the simple and the complex. This duality underpinned the philosophical reflections he developed in his pre-revolutionary writings, where he developed an account of human experience that combined principles derived from the philosophy of Leibniz and from sensationist psychology. The outcome of those reflections was a dynamic and purposive metaphysics of the self in which the simple "fact" that defined human conduct, the pursuit of pleasure, became the foundation for the structures, or "combinations," of social and economic life. Though this approach resonated with the philosophy of Helvétius, Sieyès did not promote the convergence of human interests through the regeneration of minds, and he looked instead to the creation of institutional mechanisms to harmonise those interests. It was the progression from the simple to the complex, not the reduction of morality to pleasure, that informed Sieyès' conception of the self and society.

The first component of Sieyès' metaphysics of the self was the account of liberty he put forward in his manuscript notebook *Le grand cahier métaphysique* (c. 1773-75). As part of a lengthy commentary on the sensationist philosophies of Quesnay, Condillac and Bonnet, Sieyès suggested that passive, sensitive experience was the source of human knowledge about the world, but that individuals also possessed the immanent power to generate ideas and deliberate

over their actions. This power was the definition of liberty, he argued, and it was "perfectible through experience." The first level of human understanding involved simple sensations, according to Sieyès, and those sensations shaped the emotive forms of action that dominated the lives of "less perfected men." Humans, however, could also form ideas out of what he called "composite" sensations, which were compounds of simple sensations. The ability to judge and deliberate on the basis of those ideas made it possible for individuals to pursue actions guided by "the lights of reason," he argued, and this is what allowed "liberty to grow."[216] For Sieyès, liberty was therefore proportionate to knowledge, that is, proportionate to the ability to develop combinatory arrangements of simple sensations.

Notwithstanding this capacity for liberty, Sieyès maintained that humans were primarily driven by the desire for happiness. In tune with eighteenth-century sensationist philosophy, he argued that this impulse manifested itself in the physical desire to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. As Sieyès presented it in *Le grand cahier métaphysique*, there were two facets to the pursuit of pleasure, in the same way as there were two levels in the order of human sensations. The first involved the satisfaction of primary needs which derived from the needs of self-preservation, such as food and clothing. The second consisted in the steps taken to satisfy those needs, such as work or the search for knowledge. Sieyès called these "means" and argued that those "means" could become sources of pleasure in themselves that could be met "through further means."[217] Like liberty, human happiness could therefore grow through experience. While primary needs were universal, however, the specificity and natural diversity of individual experience meant that the steps taken to satisfy them were not. "The happiness to which each man aspired," according to Sieyès, was therefore "different according to the position and the relations in which he finds himself."[218]

[216] Sieyès, "Le grand cahier métaphysique," in *Des manuscrits de Sieyès*, 1:78, 81, 141-42.
[217] Sieyès, "Le grand cahier métaphysique," 96-97.
[218] Sieyès, "Le grand cahier métaphysique," 97.

This account of human experience was original and distinctive. Although Sieyès drew on the ideas of Quesnay, Condillac and Bonnet, he put forward a theory of mind that sought to account for individual liberty without appealing to the existence of a spiritual soul. At the same time, however, he did not reduce human behaviour to the primary impulse to seek pleasure and avoid pain, in the manner of Helvétius. For Sieyès, physical sensibility was the foundation for the more developed aspects of individual experience. His approach was thus structured around a set of dualities, between simple and composite sensations, between needs and means and between happiness and liberty. These dualities were not the product of a dualism of substance but of the duality between the simple and complex in the composition of reality. Adapting Leibnizian principles, Sieyès conceived of this duality as dynamic and progressive: it was the simple that engendered the complex, whose development allowed the expansion and perfection of the simple. Sieyès' metaphysics of the self pointed to the capacity for incremental progress – of mind, of means and of freedom – out of the simple sensations, needs and impulses that underpinned human experience.[219]

According to Sieyès, there were nonetheless limits to what individuals could achieve on their own, and it was only in society that human liberty and happiness could flourish. As he described it in *Le grand cahier métaphysique*, it was in the social state that individuals could "reinforce and multiply their means," and this, he added, pointed to the need to "develop the true social order."[220] In the unpublished essay "Sur les richesses," written a few years later in the 1770s, Sieyès began to sketch out the nature of this order by describing what he took to be the true source of prosperity in human society. Contesting the views of the Physiocrats, he argued in this essay that the original source of wealth was not land, but labour. The "simple" products of

[219] Sieyès would later turn this metaphysics of the self into a broader metaphysics of forces. "Des forces simples," in *Des manuscrits de Sieyès*, 2:573-698. On the Leibnizian foundations of Sieyès' philosophy, see Jacques Guilhaumou, "Sieyès et la métaphysique allemande," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 317 (July-September 1999): 513-35; Quiviger, *Métaphysique et droit administratif chez Sieyès*, 96-127.
[220] Sieyès, "Le grand cahier métaphysique," 141.

nature were not sufficient "to raise the edifice of pleasures," according to Sieyès, and it was only through "the concourse of works" that the reproduction and multiplication of goods could be achieved. As he described it, the perfection of human happiness therefore called for the union of "a life force" whose different elements produce more together than apart. This "life force," he maintained, was "the sum of works of all citizens."[221]

The emphasis Sieyès put on the value of labour followed the approach of a range of earlier thinkers, from Locke to Rousseau.[222] He nonetheless developed an innovative argument about the relationship between individual labour, the production of wealth and the perfection of human happiness, one that anticipated the account later articulated by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). The "progress" of the social order, Sieyès suggested in "Sur les richesses," was as follows:

> First, each man satisfies by himself nearly all his pleasures. These increase with the means [at their disposal], and as they become more complicated, divisions of tasks [*les divisions des travaux*] establish themselves. The common good necessitates this, because workers are less distracted by tasks of the same nature than by different types of occupations and always tend to produce greater effects with lesser means. All tasks and their division always increase by virtue of this law: to perfect the effect, and diminish the costs.[223]

Although individuals could initially satisfy their needs by themselves, according to Sieyès, the development of their "means," or social and economic activities, multiplied and developed their sources of pleasure. That is to say, it broadened their interests and desires. This spurred the division or separation of tasks, which, in turn, made it possible to increase the overall level of pleasure ("to perfect the effect") while reducing the range of activities individuals had to perform ("diminishing the costs"). For Sieyès, the vehicle for enhancing collective prosperity and

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[221] Sieyès, "Première lettre. Sur les richesses," *Lettres aux économistes sur leur système de politique et de morale* [c. 1775], in *Écrits politiques*, ed. Roberto Zapperi (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 1985), 32, 35.
[222] Catherine Larrère, "Sieyès, lecteur des physiocrates: droit naturel ou économie?" in *Figures de Sieyès*, eds. Pierre-Yves Quiviger, Vincent Denis and Jean Salem (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2008), 201. On Rousseau's approach see Istvan Hont*, Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 100-01.
[223] Sieyès, "Sur les richesses," 33.

happiness was the institution that would come to be known, after Smith, as the division of labour.[224]

The political economy Sieyès developed in the 1770s built on the principles of his metaphysics of the self and followed a similar logic.[225] As Sieyès presented it, there was an order of progression between the simple, individual pursuit of pleasure and the complex structures of production, consumption and exchange. This order pointed to the compatibility of individual ends in the collective social order. Unlike Helvétius, Sieyès did not assume that the "fact" that humans were pleasure-seeking creatures meant that their interests had to be made to artificially converge. Rather, through a reinterpretation of Leibnizian principles, he argued that the interdependence that resulted from functional differentiation and occupational specialisation generated a system that could enhance the pleasures of all. This approach evoked the ideas of d'Holbach, who, as I discussed in chapter one, promoted the harmony of interests in society on his own reworking of Leibniz. For Sieyès, however, the perfection of human happiness did not call for a system of social hierarchy aligned with capacity, as d'Holbach had suggested, nor the inculcation of public virtue, as Helvétius maintained. It required the combination of individual activities through the division of labour, that is, the transformation of the simple into the complex.

The Representative System

Sieyès' pre-revolutionary writings informed the model of social improvement he put forward during the French Revolution. Building on his early ideas, this model centred on what he came to call the "representative system." In Sieyès' conception, this descriptor referred to both the

[224] Sieyès claimed to have established the principle of the division of labour before Smith and to have "gone farther" than him by identifying the importance of this division both within and between trades. Sieyès, "Travail ne favorise la liberté qu'en devenant représentatif," in *Écrits politiques*, 62. For a helpful comparison of Sieyès and Smith's conceptions of the division of labour, see Sewell, *Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution*, 94-102.
[225] At an individual level, the impulse to satisfy primary pleasures impelled the growth of the multiple activities, or "means," undertaken to satisfy them. In economic society, the production of wealth required the enhancement of the simple products of nature through the combinatory arrangement of human labour.

character of modern government and the nature of a society organised around the division of labour. The delegation of any task or activity could be described as an act of representation, and this meant that individuals could be said to "represent" each other when they exchanged services or traded goods in an interdependent economic system. Representation thus made it possible for individuals to enter reciprocal relationships with one another, and this was "the instrument of the progress of society."[226] For Sieyès, the advent of the representative system nonetheless called for a series of reforms that extended the harmonising principles of economic society to the realm of government. In contrast to Condorcet, Sieyès' science of society would thus be focused on the institutional, rather than moral or intellectual, levers of social improvement.

Equal Rights

The first element of a just and legitimate constitution, according to Sieyès, was the equality of rights. In a way that remained close to the Physiocrats, he argued that if the goal of society was maximising collective happiness, then its individual members each had an equal right to satisfy their needs and expand their sources of pleasure.[227] As Sieyès presented it in the introduction to his draft *Déclaration des droits de l'homme*, published in 1789, every citizen possessed a set of elementary rights, and their only restriction was to not infringe on the equivalent rights of others. The first and most important, he maintained, were the right to property over one's person ("personal property") and over the product of one's labour ("real property"), which included immovable property. These rights reflected the obligation for individual to satisfy their needs, and they were a continuation of each other, since "real property" was only "a consequence and

[226] Sieyès, "Droits de l'homme," 501. "In society everything is representation. Representation is found in the private realm as much as in the public one; it is the mother of trade and production as well as of social and political progress. Indeed I claim that it is the very essence of social life." *Sieyès's Views Concerning Several Articles of Sections IV and V of the Draft Constitution* [1795], in *The Essential Political Writings*, eds. Oliver W. Lembcke and Florian Weber (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 154.

[227] According to Mirabeau *fils*, Sieyès' account of individual rights founds its origins in the physiocratic principles of Quesnay and his father; cited in Larrère, "Sieyès, lecteur des physiocrates: droit naturel ou économie?" 195. On the similarities and differences between the two, see Edelstein, *Spirit of Rights*, 97-98, 185-86.

an extension of personal property." These were followed by the series of rights that supported the individual pursuit of happiness in society, and they included the right "to come and go as [one] wishes; to think, speak, write, print and publish; and to work, produce, save, transport, exchange and consume, etc."[228]

The purpose of individual rights, according to Sieyès, was to ensure that citizens could freely meet their needs and engage in mutually beneficial relationships with each other. These rights were also intended to protect individuals from the undue influence of the natural inequality of talents and abilities. As Sieyès described it, "society does not establish an unjust inequality of right alongside the natural inequality of means; instead, it protects the equality of rights against the natural, but harmful, influence of unequal means." This meant that political society had an obligation not simply to ensure individual liberty, but also to support and assist its members in pursuing their ends. Sieyès argued that citizens therefore had a right "to all the benefits of association," and this included a right to public assistance as well as a right to take advantage of public works and property. It also included a right to public education, which he presented as one of the best ways of ensuring the moral and physical development of citizens.[229] These additional set of privileges would enhance the freedom of citizens and further the harmonisation of human divergence in a society organised around the division of labour.

According to Sieyès, equal rights did not, however, imply the participation of every citizen in political life. There was a necessary distinction between civil and political rights, or what he also called "passive" and "active" rights. While all members of society were entitled to the former, the second could be exercised only by a limited number of citizens. In contrast to Condorcet,

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[228] Sieyès, *Préliminaire de la Constitution*, 26-28.
[229] Sieyès, *Préliminaire de la Constitution*, 25, 32; "Reasoned Exposition of the Rights of Man and Citizen," in *Essential Political Writings*, 122, 125. Sieyès also argued that public education should teach the basic principles of rights to citizens and consolidate public mores; "Projet de Constitution soumis à l'Assemblée nationale par M. Abbé Sieyès," *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860. Première série (1787 à 1799)*, eds. M. J. Mavidal and M. E. Laurent (Paris, 1875), 8:424-27.

who promoted the equal rights of men and women, Sieyès maintained that "active" political rights belonged to men who owned a certain minimum of real property. Although he decried traditional forms of privilege as "unjust, odious and contrary to the true purpose of society," Sieyès maintained that property-ownership was a necessary requirement for political participation as it was the condition for citizens' attachment to public affairs. Those who enjoyed active rights were, as he described it, the "true shareholders of the great enterprise of society," for they possessed both an "interest" and a "capacity" to contribute to public life.[230] This distinction, which would become enshrined in law in December 1789, followed the logic of Sieyès' representative system, and it extended what he took to be the salutary division of tasks and activities to voting rights.[231]

Division with Unity

The second component of Sieyès' project of constitutional reform was the establishment of a political system that combined what he termed "division with unity." According to Sieyès, this system had to be organised in such a way that power was distributed across different institutions, but which were adequately coordinated to enable just and effective government. This part of Sieyès' project was an attempt to replicate the organising processes behind the division of labour within the institutions of politics, and it involved constructing a machinery of government around the harmonising principles of functional differentiation and occupational specialisation. If the division of labour, in his view, was self-generating, the political part of the representative system was not.[232] Furthermore, achieving the balance of division with unity required of political

[230] Sieyès, *Préliminaire de la Constitution*, 36-37. On Sieyès' property-qualifications, see Erwan Sommerer, "Le nom sacré de la propriété. La figure du propriétaire révolutionnaire chez Sieyès," *Corpus* 66 (2014): 117-132. See also Jacques Guilhamou, "Sieyès, les femmes et la vérité d'un document inédit," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 306 (1996): 693-98.
[231] It also followed long-running proposals for tying political participation to property qualifications, as suggested, for instance, in Dupont de Nemours' *Mémoire sur les municipalités* (1775).
[232] As Sieyès remarked in one his manuscript texts, "the division of works, of professions, etc. is simply the representative system establishing itself spontaneously." Sieyès, "Bases de l'ordre social," 510.

institutions involved a series of reforms that were as elaborate as they would be difficult to implement under the pressure of revolutionary events. Those reforms were nonetheless the most innovative aspect of Sieyès' model of improvement, and they would shape other conceptions of social science in the 1790s.[233] They would also come to be seen by later scholars as significant contributions to the theory of the modern representative state.[234]

Sieyès put forward a number of proposals for constitutional reform over the course of the French Revolution. Three of these were particularly significant to his conception of the representative system. The first and most influential in its time was the idea that the general will of the French nation could only be expressed "by proxy." As discussed above, Sieyès developed this view in the context of revolutionary discussions over how to restore national or popular sovereignty. According to Sieyès, it was necessary for citizens to entrust political power to representatives because of the size and distribution of the French population. Representation was also necessary, he claimed, because of the nature of modern society. As he argued in 1789, "modern European peoples" were unlike the Ancients and entirely preoccupied "with commerce, agriculture and manufacturing." Alluding to the benefits of the division of labour, Sieyès maintained that "the common interest and the improvement of the social state" therefore called for "making government a particular profession."[235] In place of the demanding and unrealistic requirements of a "pure democracy" or, as he would later claim, of the dangerous aspiration to create a *ré-totale* in which the people retained complete and absolute sovereignty,

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[233] They notably informed the ideas of the revolutionary thinker Pierre-Louis Rœderer. On Rœderer's social science, see Ingrid Rademacher, "La science sociale républicaine de Pierre-Louis Roederer," *Revue française d'histoire des idées politiques* 13, no. 1 (2001): 25-55. For another reiteration of Sieyès' approach, Jean-Jacques-Régis Cambacérès, "Discours sur la science sociale," Mémoires, *Mémoires de l'Institut national des sciences et des arts. Sciences morales et politiques*, vol. 3 (Paris, Prairial an IX [1801]), 1-14.

[234] Colette Clavreul, "Sieyès et la genèse de la représentation modern," *Droits. Revue française de théorie juridique* 6 (1986): 45-56; Urbinati, "A Nation of Electors: Sieyès' Model of Representative Government," chap. 4 in *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy*. See also Pasquino, *Sieyès et l'invention de la constitution en France*; Quiviger, *Métaphysique et droit administratif chez Sieyès.*

[235] Sieyès, *Dire de l'abbé Sieyès sur la question du véto royal,* 11; *Observations sur le rapport du comité de constitution, concernant la nouvelle organisation de la France* (Versailles, 1789), 35.

modern citizens needed to delegate political and administrative responsibilities to elected officials.[236]

Sieyès' second proposal was the need to institute a graduated system of elections. Sieyès described this system as a "circulatory mechanism" operating in two directions.[237] The upward direction comprised the system by which the people elected its different representatives. This system had to involve a hierarchy of bodies. The first level would be the "primary assemblies" established in local districts across the country, where citizens could meet in person. Those assemblies would vote for a list of candidates, who would then be eligible to higher political offices. This "ascending" system of indirect election operated according to a process that Sieyès termed *adunation*, and it would serve to manage and filter the expression of the desires and wishes of the French citizenry.[238] The downward direction, meanwhile, consisted in the process of nomination of selected individuals to various public and administrative offices by political representatives. Together, the two parts of the system of graduated election would replicate the processes of selection, distribution and differentiation that emerged organically in the non-political part of the representative system.[239] This system would, in other words, provide an institutional solution to the natural divergence of individual interests and desires.

The last of Sieyès' proposals was the separation of powers and functions. Establishing and maintaining this separation was crucial to ensuring collective liberty and happiness, he claimed, but it required, as in the other elements of the political system, a careful balance between division and unity.[240] As he explained in a series of remarks on the newly proposed French Constitution

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[236] On the distinction between a *ré-totale* and *république*, see *Opinion de Sieyès, sur plusieurs articles des titres IV et V*, 7; Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*, 14-15.
[237] For this description, see *Opinion de Sieyès, sur plusieurs articles des titres IV et V*, 3.
[238] Sieyès, "Du nouvel établissement public de l'instruction en France," in *Journal d'instruction sociale* 5 (1793), 146.
[239] Sieyès' graduated system of election was publicised by Mirabeau in constitutional debates in late 1789, where he noted that it followed the ideas earlier developed by Rousseau. On the origins and fate of this system during the French Revolution, see Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*, 77-78, 314-17; *Sans-Culottes*, 301-04.
[240] "In politics, mixing up and conflating power is what constantly makes it impossible to establish social order on earth. Inversely, by separating what should be distinct, it will be possible finally to solve the great problem of

in 1795, the necessary system of balance in a political constitution could be compared to the way in which the faculties of the human mind operated:

> It does not charge several different representative bodies with constructing – or reconstructing – the same piece of work. Rather, it assigns different tasks to different representatives, so that their distinct activities together reliably yield the desired outcome. This system does not place two or three heads onto the same body, expecting that the defects of one will somehow correct the harm caused by the defects of the other. It carefully separates within a single head the different faculties whose distinct operations have to come together in order to produce wise decisions, and it coordinates these faculties through rules which naturally unify all the different legislative activities into the action of a single mind.[241]

Like the human mind, the different powers and functions of government needed to be distinguished from one another yet come together to produce political action. This distinction did not simply involve the division of legislative and executive powers, but also the separation of different functions within those powers; it was both horizontal and vertical.[242] The outcome would be a coordinated system of government, or what Sieyès called "the system of concerted action, or organised unity." "This should become the French system," he insisted, for it was the one towards which "the social art directs us with each step along the path of human perfectibility." It was reasonable to hope, he added, "that it will one day be the system of all free and enlightened peoples."[243]

The end-product of the science of the social order, for Sieyès, would be a system of government that was both the outcome of human perfectibility and one that gave space to further improvements through the development of economic society. Although he presented this "French system" as one that would become diffused and adopted by all free societies, he did not conceive it as fixed and invariable. In one of the later developments of his political theory, he

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establishing a human society arranged for the general advantage of those who compose it." Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?* 143.

[241] Sieyès, *Views Concerning Several Articles of the Draft Constitution*, 158.

[242] Sieyès, for instance, praised the distinction, in the draft constitution of 1794, between "the authority to propose legislation from the authority to decide on legislation"; *Views Concerning Several Articles of the Draft Constitution*, 159. On the distinction between a horizontal and vertical separation of powers, see Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*, 57-58. The most well-known component of Sieyès' theory of the separation of powers was the distinction he proposed between "constituent" and "constituted" powers. On this theory, see Rubinelli, "Sieyès and the French Revolution."

[243] Sieyès, *Views Concerning Several Articles of the Draft Constitution*, 159.

thus proposed the institution of an independent advisory body, or "constitutional jury," that would periodically suggest improvements to the existing constitution. As Sieyès described it, this body would provide an "organic" way of perfecting political institutions that would accommodate "the right of future generations to choose their own political order." In this way, the constitution would be guided "by a principle of unlimited perfectibility" and "adaptable to the needs of different eras."[244] Social stability and harmony, for Sieyès, were less conditions of the regeneration of minds or the cultivation of moral conduct, than the establishment of ever-perfectible institutions of government.

Unlimited Perfectibility

The proposals for constitutional reform Sieyès put forward during the French Revolution were designed to further the advent of a properly combined political machine, underpinned by the principle of equal rights (at least in the "passive" sense) and endowed with a capacity for "unlimited perfectibility." Those reforms, as he conceived them, called upon the wisdom of social science, and they involved extending the principles behind the division of labour to the organisation of government. Although he built on the Physiocrats' emphasis on economic reform, Sieyès substituted their ideal of an agricultural kingdom for that of a representative state whose power and authority ultimately derived from the citizen-members of an industrious, commercial society. Several of the proposals and conceptual innovations Sieyès developed as part of this project were adopted and taken on by fellow reformers, particularly at the outset of the French Revolution. His more elaborate ideas, however, such as his system of graduated elections, were difficult to follow or straightforwardly opposed by revolutionaries with different visions of moral and political regeneration. In a twist of fate, when Sieyès was finally given the chance to reshape the French constitution in the late 1790s, his efforts were overshadowed by

[244] *The Opinion of Sieyès Concerning the Tasks and Organisation of the Constitutional Jury, Submitted on the Second Thermidor* [1795], in *Essential Political Writings*, 177. On Sieyès' conception of the constitutional jury, see Lucien Jaume, "Sieyès et le sens du jury constitutionnaire: une réinterprétation," *Droits* 36, no. 2 (2002): 115-34.

the unrivalled ambition of Napoléon Bonaparte, the young general he had sought to help implement his reforms.[245]

The model of improvement Sieyès advanced in his works would not be adopted, in the same form, by later thinkers. His approach nonetheless shaped and inspired the subsequent search for a science of society in a number of ways. As I show in chapter three, the Idéologues Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis followed his interest in grounding moral and political principles in a sensationist analysis of individual faculties. Hoping to stabilise and consolidate the existing system of government, under the Directory, they nonetheless retreated from his more metaphysical conceptions and developed approaches more focused on the perfectibility of those faculties, than on the perfection of political institutions. Although Saint-Simon repudiated Sieyès' political ideas, as I argue in chapter four, he built on Sieyès' theory of the division of labour in his Restoration works. Unlike Sieyès, however, Saint-Simon derived his model of improvement, not from a metaphysics of the self, but from a philosophy of history inspired by the other major proponent of a science of society in the early years of the French Revolution, Condorcet.

The Project of a Social Mathematics

Like Sieyès, Condorcet's science of society was tied a model of social improvement. While Sieyès focused on constitutional reform and the development of the division of labour, however, Condorcet gave priority to perfecting individual mind and behaviour. Although constitutional change was important for Condorcet, it was the reform of public education that was key, in his view, to furthering liberty and happiness in society. By the same token, Condorcet did not conceive of social science like Sieyès as a specialised and distinct branch of knowledge whose chief purpose was to guide legislators and shape public policy. For Condorcet, the science of society was the result of the gradual and cumulative development of all forms of knowledge, and

[245] On this episode, see Andrew Jainchill, "Liberal Authoritarianism and the Constitution of the Year VIII," chap. 5 in *Reimagining Politics After the Terror*.

it was one whose content should be made available to the wider citizenry. This science, in his view, rested on a probabilistic theory of knowledge and behaviour, and it was based on mathematical rather than metaphysical principles. Its ultimate outcome would be, not an account of the complex structures of a political constitution, but a future-oriented philosophy of history that looked to the global spread of simple sentiments of virtue.

There was a somewhat circular relationship between Condorcet's science of social mathematics and his vision of human improvement. This science was made possible by the progress of knowledge, he argued, but its development would itself be the source of further advancements, notably the capacity to predict the future. While Sieyès conceived of his science of the social order as a tool for perfecting society and politics, Condorcet presented social mathematics as both an effect and a cause of human improvement. This partly reflected his belief in the connection between intellectual and moral progress, or between the acquisition of knowledge and the capacity for virtuous conduct. More fundamentally, it pointed to the circularity underlying Condorcet's model of improvement: men and women possessed a natural inclination for pity and compassion, this inclination had been corrupted by error and prejudice, but the diffusion of knowledge would revive and stimulate the moral sentiments that this natural inclination inspired. Condorcet's model thus looked to the recovery of the elementary dispositions of the human mind and the convergence of individual capacities in time. This model, in contradistinction to Sieyès', envisaged a transformation of the complex into the simple, and it rested on a new conception of perfectibility.

Human Perfectibility Reconstructed

In *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, Condorcet provided a clear and seemingly unambiguous genealogy of the concept at the heart of his work. As he described it, the "first and most brilliant apostles" of what he called "the doctrine of the indefinite perfectibility of the human species" were "Turgot, Price and Priestley." As mentioned in the previous chapter,

this genealogy did not self-evidently match onto the claims developed in the *Esquisse*. All three thinkers conceived of human improvement in a religious idiom, and their approaches did not appear to align with Condorcet's secular philosophy of history. The origins of Condorcet's concept of perfectibility were therefore less transparent than this genealogy implied. Although Condorcet followed the aforementioned thinkers in several respects, as I come back to below, his approach built on eighteenth-century attempts to articulate an account of human improvement that did not require belief in the active and beneficent powers of God, and it drew on the ideas of Rousseau and Helvétius in particular. The originality of Condorcet's concept of perfectibility, in this context, was that it would provide a synthesis of naturalistic and providential theories of human improvement. This synthesis requires careful reconstruction.

Condorcet gave the fullest account of his concept of perfectibility not in the *Esquisse*, but in a draft of the section of the *Tableau historique* detailing the first stage of history, one of the texts that formed a part of the larger corpus of works that he composed while he was in hiding in 1793-94.[246] This text began, in a similar way to Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, with a discussion of human-animal difference.[247] In contrast to Rousseau, however, Condorcet did not ascribe the faculty of perfectibility solely to humans:

> We do not object to the individual perfectibility of animals, which is born of instruction, and with regards the perfectibility of entire species, it seems to be confirmed by the difference in the industry of beavers when they are isolated or in small groups compared to when they live together in larger colonies. To develop [their perfectibility], animals need areas where they enjoy the liberty and security which man has taken away from them in the places where he extends his empire. It is contained in much narrower bounds than human perfectibility. But its existence is no less real. Hence, everything proves that, placed at the top of the animal scale, without ceasing to be of the same nature, we have simply been more favourably treated in the distribution of the common faculties that are its product.[248]

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[246] This draft is included, under the title "Esquisse de la première époque" in Condorcet, *Tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain: Projets, Esquisse, Fragments et Notes, 1772-1794*, eds. Jean-Pierre Schandeler and Pierre Crépel (Paris: Institut national d'études démographiques, 2004). It was first published as "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1847), 289-381. This is the version I refer to here.

[247] Condorcet was a close reader of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, and, in one of his early manuscript texts, he conjectured that the art of forging metals may have played a crucial role in the development of human knowledge and passions. This claim was not repeated, however, in his later works. Condorcet, "Sur le role historique de l'art de trouver des métaux et de les employer," [c. 1768-1782], in *Tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, 199.

[248] Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 294-95.

According to Condorcet, animals had a capacity for both individual and collective improvement, and he cited, as an example of this, the varying levels of "industry" that could be observed in beaver populations. Humans had restricted the ability for animals to perfect their faculties, he argued, but this did not reflect a distinction of kind between them. Rather, the difference between humans and animals was one of scale, and the greater perfectibility of the former was simply the result of their more favourable natural endowments.[249]

Condorcet thus emphasised the natural continuity of species in a way that recalled Helvétius' earlier description of the similarity between humans and animals. As discussed in the previous chapter, Helvétius associated human perfectibility with the desire for new impressions. Condorcet, in contrast, maintained that it reflected the particular combination of natural advantages humans enjoyed.[250] Those advantages were three-fold, he argued. Firstly, humans had a set of attributes that were beneficial to their physical development, which included bipedalism, the variety of their diet and their lengthy maturation. Secondly, they possessed greater capacities of mind, as a result of the "disposition of the organs of memory and thought" of the human brain.[251] The final and most significant human advantage, however, was their ability to sympathise with the suffering of others.[252] This ability, which originated in the "painful sensations" that individuals experienced when they saw others suffer, sustained the social bonds that emerged within and between human families, and it was the source of elementary principles

[249] As noted by the editors of 2004 edition of the text, Condorcet drew here on the arguments continuity developed by Buffon in *Les Perroquets* (1779) and Le Roy in *Lettres philosophiques sur l'intelligence et la perfectibilité des animaux* (1768); "Esquisse de la première époque," 484, n. 30.
[250] "Si aucun de ces avantages de l'espèce humaine ne lui est exclusivement réservé, si chacun d'eux appartient à quelques espèces, aucune ne les réunit; et en considérant ce qui doit résulter de leur combinaison, nous trouverons une explication suffisante de cette distance immense qui sépare aujourd'hui l'homme du reste des animaux." "Cette primauté de l'homme paraît consister bien plus dans un développement plus entier, dans une perfection plus grande des facultés semblables, que dans la possession exclusive de quelques-unes, qui, dépendant d'organes communs à diverses espèces d'animaux, auraient cependant été refusées à toutes les autres." Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 292.
[251] Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 290-92.
[252] Condorcet suggested that animals likely possessed this capacity, but to a lesser extent. Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 294. Condorcet first articulated this view in a letter to Turgot, in which he criticised Helvétius for denying the existence of natural sentiments of compassion in humans. Condorcet to Turgot, 13 December 1773 in *Correspondance inédite de Condorcet et de Turgot, 1770-1779*, ed. Charles Henry (Paris, 1883), 148-49.

of justice, equality and rights. According to Condorcet, it was this capacity for fellow-feeling that underlay the perpetuation of society, and it created the setting in which human faculties developed and flourished.[253]

These views drew implicitly on Rousseau's moral philosophy. They also followed ideas developed by Adam Smith. Rousseau, in his *Second Discourse*, insisted that men were "naturally good," and he ascribed to them the basic sentiment of "pity," which he associated with the "innate repugnance to see his kind suffer." For Rousseau, this natural sentiment was prior to all reflection, however, and it did not induce an inclination to form social bonds.[254] Smith, by contrast, argued in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) that humans naturally experienced "pity or compassion" when faced with "the misery of others." He maintained that this experience turned into a sentiment, which he called "sympathy," and this sentiment, which was the product of humans' imaginative capacities, shaped the "fellow-feelings" individuals acquired and developed in society.[255] Although Condorcet followed Smith's emphasis on the social implications of sympathy, he argued that this sentiment, which he would also call a "moral sense," derived from the experience of painful sensations, not from the faculty of imagination.[256] In tune with the ideas later developed by Sophie de Grouchy, his wife, who went on to translate

[253] "L'homme ne pouvait ni perpétuer ni former une société de famille sans que la sensation pénible qui naît à la vue des douleurs des êtres souffrants, se transformât en un sentiment de malaise lorsqu'il leur voyait éprouver des besoins, sentiment duquel a dû naître bientôt et le désir de soulager ces besoins, et lorsqu'il les aidait à y pourvoir, un mouvement de plaisir, récompense naturelle de cette bienfaisance presque machinale. Un attachement plus vif pour ceux à l'égard desquels il éprouvait journellement ces sentiments, en était une conséquence infaillible, et ils sont devenus à leur égard de premières habitudes morales." Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 298 and 326-27 (on the link between sympathy and individual rights).
[254] Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 127, 152.
[255] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 2nd ed. (London, 1761), 1-3. These ideas built on the moral sense theory of Francis Hutcheson and Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury. James A. Harris, "Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and the Moral Sense," in *The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy*, eds. Sacha Golob and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 325-37. On the question of the relationship between Rousseau and Smith's moral theories, see Pierre Force, "Rousseau and Smith: On Sympathy as First Principle," in *Thinking with Rousseau: From Machiavelli to Schmitt*, eds. Helena Rosenblatt and Paul Schweigert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 115-31.
[256] Condorcet, "Troisième mémoire. Sur l'instruction commune pour les hommes," *Bibliothèque de l'homme public*, 2nd year, vol. 3 (1791): 8, n. 1.

Smith's work, Condorcet brought human morality back to physical sensibility.[257] In doing so, he aligned his theory of moral sentiments with the principles of eighteenth-century sensationist psychology.

Condorcet's conception of human perfectibility thus rested on an account of individual faculties that combined a sensationist theory of the mind, in the tradition of Helvétius, with Rousseau's emphasis on the natural goodness of man, by way of Smith's notion of sympathy.[258] The originality of his approach is best illustrated by the significance he gave to the institution of the family. As Condorcet described it, this institution was the site in which humans first acquired and developed their moral sentiments. The family was the product of need, but it produced intense ties of interest and duty, both between parents and their offspring and between the parents themselves.[259] Those ties led to the sharing of work between men and women, and their distinct abilities allowed them to contribute to their common subsistence in complementary ways.[260] Although family bonds could sometimes lead to self-interested behaviour, Condorcet maintained that the first human societies grew out of the union of different families.[261] Thus

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[257] Adam Smith, *Théorie des sentimens moraux*, transl. Sophie de Grouchy, 2 vols. (Paris, an VI [1798]). De Grouchy attached a series of letters to her translation, likely addressed to Cabanis, in which she developed her own account of moral sympathy; "Lettres sur la sympathie," 2:355-507. On these letters, see *Sophie de Grouchy's Letters on Sympathy: A Critical Engagement with Adam Smith's the Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. Sandrine Bergès and Eric Schliesser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). On the reception of Smith's ideas during the French Revolution, see Richard Whatmore, "Adam Smith's Role in the French Revolution," *Past and Present* 175 (2002): 65-89; Ruth Scurr, "Inequality and Political Stability from Ancien Régime to Revolution: The Reception of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in France," *History of European Ideas* 35, no. 4 (2009): 441-49. On Sophie de Grouchy's political thought, see Kathleen Theodora McCrudden, "Fraternité, Liberté, Égalité: Sophie de Grouchy, Moral Republicanism, and the History of Liberalism, 1785-1815" (PhD diss., Yale, 2021).

[258] For a different window into the relationship between Condorcet and Helvétius' philosophies, see Emmanuelle de Champs, "Happiness and Interests in Politics: A Late-Enlightenment Debate," in *Happiness and Utility: Essays Presented to Frederick Rosen*, eds. Georgios Varouxakis and Mark Philp (London: UCL Press, 2019), 20-39.

[259] "Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 295-96. In another of the texts he composed in 1793-94, he argued that the loving bonds of the family were crucial for encouraging sentiments of sympathy and compassion in children. Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la X^e^ époque," 546-47.

[260] "L'homme et la femme commencent à se partager les travaux. Les dangers auxquels expose le soin de la défense commune, les occupations qui exigent une plus grande intensité de force, furent réservés à l'un. L'autre fut chargée des travaux qui ne demandaient que du temps, de la peine, de la patience." "La femme peut, presque autant que l'homme, contribuer à la subsistance commune; la dépendance des enfants n'y est entière que pendant les premières années; ils deviennent plus tôt capables de chercher, de recueillir, de transporter leur nourriture." Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 303, 324.

[261] "Nous pouvons regarder ces familles séparées comme la source première des nations entre lesquelles l'espèce humaine s'est partagée." Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 297.

obviating the claim that humans were naturally independent, as Rousseau had argued, or that their unchecked individual interests came into conflict with each other, as Helvétius maintained, Condorcet argued that humans were predisposed to form social bonds, and that this predisposition grew out of the innate sentiments and inclinations that developed in the family.[262]

This conception of human perfectibility was the foundation for the ideas Condorcet developed in the *Esquisse*, where he outlined, in abbreviated form, what he took to be the successive stages of the history of the human mind. Condorcet's crucial claim in this work, however, was that this history did not simply confirm the human capacity for perfectibility, it was evidence that "nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties." As he declared at the start of his work, this history showed that human perfectibility was "truly indefinite," that its development had "no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us" and that the improvements so far witnessed in the course of human events would "never be reversed."[263] According to Condorcet, human perfectibility was boundless and no power could halt or undo its achievements. Although Condorcet's account of the origins of human perfectibility drew on an analysis of the past, it was ultimately oriented towards the future.

It was in articulating this future-oriented vision of human improvement that Condorcet drew on Turgot, Price and Priestley. Each of these thinkers had indeed conjectured that humans possessed a capacity for betterment that appeared to be without limits, "everlasting" or "unbounded."[264] In these conceptions, this capacity was associated with the workings of the

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[262] On the importance of the family in Condorcet's moral and political philosophy, see Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 209-11. It has recently been shown that Sophie de Grouchy likely edited the manuscript of Condorcet's *Esquisse* before its publication in 1795 and that her views, in all probability, contributed to the emphasis Condorcet gave to moral sympathy and to family life in this and his other works. Sandrine Bergès, "Family, Gender, and Progress: Sophie de Grouchy and Her Exclusion in the Publication of Condorcet's *Sketch of Human Progress*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 79, no. 2 (April 2018): 267-83.

[263] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 2. For the original articulation of this view, see Condorcet, "Plan détaillé d'un *Tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*" [c. 1780s], in *Tableau historique*, 163-64.

[264] See, respectively, Turgot, "Second discours," 54; Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (London, 1758), 149; Joseph Priestley, *An Essay on the First Principles of Government, and on the Nature of Political, Civil and Religious Liberty*, 2nd ed. (London, 1771), 1-2.

guiding hand of Providence. For Price, God was not "an indifferent spectator" to the events in the world and he was compelled "to direct them agreeably to the ends of goodness."[265] Priestley likewise suggested that it seemed "to be the uniform intention of divine providence to lead mankind to happiness" in a progressive manner.[266] Turgot, meanwhile, argued that providence had "engraved in all hearts" the sentiments "of the good and the honest" and suggested that the order of the universe showed "the imprint of the hand of God."[267] Condorcet, by contrast, gave no place to spiritual or supernatural forces in accounting for human improvement, and he rejected what he dismissively described as "those chimeras" derived from "the imagination of theologians and philosophers."[268] His faith in human perfectibility reflected his belief, not in the grace of God, but in the capacity for indefinite improvement of individual faculties.

Condorcet gave voice to this belief in the tenth and last chapter of the *Esquisse*. As he explained in this section of his work, the "strength and limits" of human intelligence might remain unchanged over time, but the perfection of the intellectual tools at one's disposal made it possible for individuals to unceasingly expand their knowledge.[269] He also insisted that the development of the science of morality would not only serve to further efforts at social and political reform, but that it would facilitate the perfection of individual moral sentiments and

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265 Price, *Four Dissertations* (London, 1767), 5-6.
266 Priestley, *Essay on First Principles*, 260.
267 Turgot, "Second discours," 71; "Plan des discours sur l'histoire universelle," [c. 1751] in *Œuvres de Mr. Turgot*, 2:213. On Turgot's "Christian humanism," see Catherine Larrère, "Histoire et nature chez Turgot," in *Sens du devenir et pensée de l'histoire au temps des Lumières*, eds. Bertrand Binoche and Franck Tinland (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2000), 186-96.
268 "On verra [que l'homme] peut connaître la bienfaisance et la justice sans qu'un dieu ou descende lui-même sur la terre, ou charge un individu privilégié de l'y représenter. La formation des sociétés, l'invention des premiers arts, la ressemblance qu'on observe dans l'usage des nations qui sont parvenues au même degré de civilisation, est la suite naturelle du développement des facultés semblables, et ne suppose ni une tige commune dont les chefs auraient reçu une instruction céleste, ou un peuple primitif dont on conserve les traditions, mais dont il faudrait expliquer les progrès d'une autre manière. Ainsi l'on voit disparaître ces chimères de l'imagination des théologiens et des philosophes…" Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la I^re^ époque," 380-81.
269 "The strength and the limits of man's intelligence may remain unaltered; and yet the instruments that he uses will increase and improve, the language that fixes and determines his ideas will acquire greater breadth and precision and, unlike mechanics where an increase of force means a decrease of speed, the methods that lead genius to the discovery of truth increase at once the force and the speed of its operations." Condorcet, *Sketch*, 135.

dispositions.[270] By detailing the nature of these improvements in the larger history of progress of which the *Esquisse* was but the draft, Condorcet famously asked,

> … do not all all these observations which I propose to develop further in my book, show that the moral goodness of man, the necessary consequence of his constitution, is capable of indefinite perfection like all his other faculties, and that nature has linked together in an unbreakable chain truth, happiness and virtue?[271]

I examine these claims in more detail below, when I come back to the *Esquisse*, but what is important here is that Condorcet reconfigured the "doctrine" of Turgot, Price and Priestley. He severed their accounts of human improvement from their relationship to Providence, and emphasised instead individuals' natural capacity for intellectual and moral perfectibility. Condorcet sought to harness this capacity during the French Revolution through two main instruments: public education and social mathematics.

Public Education and Social Mathematics

The early years of the French Revolution saw a range of proposals for the reform of public education, as revolutionaries sought to carry out a programme of social regeneration that went beyond the mere transformation of the legal and political system.[272] Condorcet was one of the most prominent advocates of educational reform in this period, and he put forward an ambitious plan that built on his conception of perfectibility. Public education, in his view, had to be adapted to people's abilities and the time they could spend in formal schooling, but every citizen had to acquire the basic tools that were required to enjoy their rights and pursue different occupations. Condorcet also argued that education involved the diffusion of knowledge as well as the cultivation of moral sentiments, in both children and adults and, crucially, both men and women. The development of a social mathematics would, in his view, further and complement

[270] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 139-40.
[271] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 140.
[272] Robert R. Palmer, *The Improvement of Humanity: Education and the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Adrian O'Connor, *In Pursuit of Politics: Education and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

those objectives. A tension would nonetheless emerge between the democratic aspirations of his educational proposals and his elitist conception of politics.[273] This tension pointed to the difficulty of reconciling the sovereignty of reason with the principle of political consent. It also foreshadowed the emphasis, by later theorists, on rule by an enlightened elite.

Condorcet outlined his proposals for educational reform in a series of "memoirs" published in 1791, and likely co-authored with Sophie de Grouchy.[274] In these, he argued for the creation of a tiered system of public education that would be free and open to both sexes. He proposed that there should be primary schools in every village, teaching children basic skills and knowledge as well as fostering the development of simple sentiments of benevolence by presenting them with "short moral tales" or by encouraging them to exercise "pity towards animals."[275] Condorcet expected that most children would attend only primary school, but he proposed that secondary and tertiary schools should be established and provide students with more advanced forms of learning across a range of subjects. Meanwhile, he suggested that the dissemination of textbooks, dictionaries and the creation of public libraries would encourage the diffusion of knowledge in the adult population. Virtuous conduct in the citizenry could also be bolstered by promoting habits of conscience and reasoned judgement. This could be achieved by creating "simple tables" setting out basic moral principles alongside the various forms of conduct they entailed. Those tables would serve as heuristic devices and assist those with even little instruction, he claimed, to "make progress in practical morality."[276]

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[273] I build here on Baker, *Condorcet*, 263; "Scientism, Elitism and Liberalism: The Case of Condorcet," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century* 55 (1967): 129-65.
[274] These would form the basis of the legislative project he submitted to the Assemblée Nationale in 1792. For the initial statement of his educational philosophy, see "Premier mémoire. Nature et objet de l'instruction publique," *Bibliothèque de l'homme public*, 2nd year, vol. 1 (1791): 3-80. For the legislative project, see "Rapport et projet de décret sur l'organisation générale de l'instruction publique, présentés à l'Assemblée nationale au nom du Comité d'instruction publique" [1792], in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, 7:449-573. For the claim of co-authorship, see McCrudden, "Sophie de Grouchy, Moral Republicanism, and the History of Liberalism."
[275] Condorcet, "Second mémoire. Sur l'instruction commune pour les enfans," *Bibliothèque de l'homme public*, 2nd year, vol. 2 (1791): 10-12. He made the same proposals in his legislative plan: "Rapport et projet de décret sur l'instruction publique," 459-60, n. 1. See also Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la Xe époque," *Œuvres de Condorcet*, 6:545-49.
[276] Condorcet, "Sur l'instruction commune pour les hommes," 12-13.

Another important aspect of Condorcet's proposals was the idea that public education should encourage vocational learning but prevent the pernicious effects of occupational specialisation. Echoing Sieyès, he praised the benefits of the division of labour and insisted that "common utility" required that professional occupations become "more and more specialised." Condorcet nonetheless insisted that specialisation could lead to a narrowing of individual minds, as Smith had earlier signalled in *The Wealth of Nations*, and he warned of the risk that "people will contract that stupidity which is natural to men who are limited to a small number of ideas of the same kind." In contrast to Sieyès, he also maintained that public functions could not become a specialised profession, as it would threaten public liberty and lead to "a form of aristocracy." For Condorcet, it was therefore imperative that, along with preparing students for different occupations, public education impart them with the general knowledge they required to contribute to public life. "The freest country," he declared, was the one in which "the greatest number of public functions can be exercised by those who have received simply common instruction."[277] The convergence of basic intellectual capacities, according to Condorcet, was therefore critical to preserving political liberty and equality in a society organised around the division of labour.

The convergence of capacities of mind was particularly important when it came to the equality of the sexes. According to Condorcet, women needed to have access to the same education as men. This was becausethey had the same basic rights and, although they did not currently take on public or political functions, they required the same basic knowledge to participate in society.[278] Condorcet also argued that equality of instruction was necessaryso that mothers could support

[277] Condorcet, "The Nature and Purpose of Public Instruction" [1791], in *Selected Writings*, 118-19; "Nature et objet de l'instruction publique," 31-34. As he described it elsewhere, this general knowledge included an understanding of individual rights and of the general principles of social science, politics and political economy. Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la X^{e} époque," 582-83.

[278] For Condorcet's defence of the rights of women, see his "On the Emancipation of Women. On Giving Women the Right of Citizenship" [1790], in *Political Writings*, 15-62; originally published as "Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité," Art social, *Journal de la société de 1789* 5 (3 July 1790): 1-13.

the education of their children and in order to prevent the rise of inequality within the family. Consistent with the significance he gave to the institution of the family in shaping individual sentiments, Condorcet maintained that equal instruction was crucial to avoiding the emergence of "a pronounced inequality, not only between husband and wife, but also between brother and sister, and even between mother and son." "Equality was everywhere," he declared, "but especially in the family," which was the first site "of happiness, peace and virtue."[279] The education of men and women was thus essential, according to Condorcet, to sustaining both a felicitous society and a just politics.

The last significant element in Condorcet's plan was the idea that, while public instruction should promote the diffusion of virtuous conduct in society, it also needed to encourage freedom of thought. To support this approach, Condorcet distinguished between what he called "education" and "instruction." The first described the model of the Ancients, in which children received a form of teaching that sought to instil submission to pre-existing moral dictates. The second was a system in which knowledge was taught without dogmatism. This was the model suited to contemporary societies, according to Condorcet, as it aligned modern principles of right and with the freedom of opinion, in particular.[280] Though Condorcet's own approach to moral instruction seemed to imply the inculcation of particular precepts, he insisted that public education needed to subject all opinions to "free examination." This was especially important in political matters. The principles of a political constitution should be taught simply as positive facts and not as a doctrine, he argued, to ensure that citizens were "capable of evaluating and

[279] Condorcet, "The Nature and Purpose of Public Instruction," 134-40; "Nature et objet de l'instruction publique," 64-77.
[280] Condorcet, "Nature et objet de l'instruction publique," 40-49. On the importance of the diversity of opinions in Condorcet's moral and political philosophy, see Emma Rothschild, "Condorcet and the Conflict of Values," *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1996): 677-701.

correcting it" and so that each generation could become "more and more worthy of governing itself by its own reason."[281]

Condorcet thus set up his plan for educational reform against those who wished to establish a system that would encourage patriotic devotion to the state. In the early 1790s, this included the proponents of a system of "national education" which, drawing inspiration from the Ancients, would cultivate republican virtue in the French citizenry through ritualised expressions of public morality.[282] Condorcet's emphasis on individual freedom also distinguished his approach from the earlier philosophies of Helvétius and the Physiocrats Mirabeau and Le Mercier. Although they pursued different projects, these thinkers explicitly built on religious models of education. Condorcet agreed with Helvétius on the equal capacity for education of both sexes, and, through Turgot, he followed the physiocratic emphasis on diffusing principles of natural right in society. In his view, however, public education could not be modelled on religious forms of instruction: it had to provide citizens with the tools to decide for themselves which course of action to follow, or, as he described it, "to render universal, in a people, the independent use of enlightened reason."[283] This is where social mathematics came in.

The project of a social mathematics originated in Condorcet's desire to place moral and political science on a more secure epistemological footing. Over the course of its development, he would come to give greater emphasis, however, to its use in guiding human conduct.[284] In the first iteration of this project, in the 1780s, Condorcet proposed that mathematical calculations could

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[281] Condorcet, "Nature et objet de l'instruction publique," 47-48, 58-59. In his legislative plan, Condorcet specified that the "absolute freedom of opinion" was required only in teaching above the primary level. "Rapport et projet de décret sur l'instruction publique," 523-24.
[282] Baker, *Condorcet*, 316-20; Palmer, *Education and the French Revolution*, 129-34.
[283] "Ce ne sont point des dogmes philosophiques ou politiques qui sont l'objet d'une instruction conforme aux vrais principes de la raison, aux intérêts, aux droits de ceux qui la reçoivent; on ne doit y connaître aucune espèce de catéchisme." Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la X^{e} époque," 575, 579.
[284] The best account of the origins and development of this project remains Baker's *Condorcet*. See also Éric Brian, "Mathematics, Administrative Reform and Social Sciences in France at the End of the Eighteenth Century," in *The Rise of the Social Sciences and the Formation of Modernity*, eds. Johan Heilbron, Lars Magnusson and Björn Wittrock (Dordrecht: Springer, 1998), 207-24.

be brought to bear on a range of social and political questions, and he published a study applying the calculus of probabilities to collective decision-making procedures.[285] By 1793, Condorcet proposed that social mathematics could inform both public policy and individual decision-making. Drawing on demographic and other population-wide data, he argued that this science could provide useful information to legislators and public administrators about different aspects of social and economic life. More originally, Condorcet claimed that probability calculations could be employed by individuals to evaluate the credibility of facts, determine the likely consequences of their actions and allow them to determine rightful avenues of conduct. Social mathematics would thus become a "common, everyday science," he proposed, and contribute to "bringing the light of reason to questions too long abandoned to the seductive influences of the imagination, of interest or of the passions."[286]

Notwithstanding these loftier aspirations, Condorcet considered that public education would further the dissemination of one key insight among the citizenry: the need to correlate political authority with enlightenment. As he argued in his study of collective decision-making procedures, the veracity of such decisions increased in proportion to the degree of enlightenment of the body making them.[287] Although this discovery was relatively banal, as Keith Baker has remarked, it shaped part of what Condorcet hoped to achieve with the diffusion of knowledge in society: popular consent to the rule of an enlightened elite.[288] Despite his grand hopes about the convergence of capacities of mind, and the democratisation of political

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[285] Condorcet, *Essai sur l'application de l'analyse à la probabilité des décisions* (Paris, 1785).
[286] Condorcet, "A General View of the Science of Social Mathematics" [1793], in *Selected Writings*, 190, 194; originally published as "Tableau général qui a pour objet l'application du calcul aux sciences politiques et morales" in *Journal d'instruction sociale* (1793). Condorcet had earlier proposed the introduction of a course, at higher levels of public education, on the application of mathematical calculations to the moral and political sciences. Condorcet, "Sur l'instruction commune pour les enfans," 67, 71-72; "Rapport et projet de décret sur l'instruction publique," 539-40. For a similar account of the uses of social mathematics, see Condorcet, "Fragment de l'histoire de la X^{e} époque," 559-60.
[287] Condorcet, *Essai sur l'application de l'analyse à la probabilité des décisions*.
[288] "Stripped of its mathematical trappings, Condorcet's argument is simply that more enlightened assemblies make truer (or more probably true) decisions, while less enlightened assemblies make less true (or less probably true) decisions." Baker aptly described this approach as a "calculus of consent." Baker, *Condorcet*, 237.

functions that this entailed, Condorcet insisted that even minimally-educated citizens would recognise "the need to entrust their interests to enlightened men." The diffusion of knowledge in society would make it possible, he argued, for citizens to either be led by their own reason or know which guides it ought to follow, and thus avoid being seduced by the politically ambitious.[289] The reform of public education would, in this way, herald what Condorcet proclaimed to be the only sovereign of free peoples – "the truth" – and further the ideal of a republic of reason.[290]

Condorcet's educational philosophy thus appeared to suggest two divergent visions of human improvement. It implied, on the one hand, that the diffusion of knowledge and virtuous conduct in society would enable the greater participation of citizens in politics. At the same time, however, Condorcet insisted that rule by an educated elite was one of the conditions for just and orderly government. In the context of the fractious and tumultuous developments of the early 1790s, this tension arguably reflected his desire to pursue an ambitious project of moral and intellectual regeneration yet contain the unwieldy passions of a largely uneducated populace. It also pointed to a more enduring theme in early French social science. As discussed in the previous chapter, Physiocrats and other reformers like Helvétius and d'Holbach had long sought to promote the diffusion of more enlightened values among the public. While some of them promoted the idea of representative government, however, none of them called for the participation of the entire citizenry in political life. The need to contain popular passions would

[289] "L'homme peu instruit, mais bien instruit, sait reconnaître la supériorité qu'un autre a sur lui, et en convenir sans peine. Ainsi une éducation qui accoutume à sentir le prix de la vérité, à estimer ceux qui la découvrent ou qui savent l'employer, est le seul moyen d'assurer la félicité et la liberté d'un peuple. Alors, il pourra ou se conduire lui-même, ou se choisir de bons guides, juger d'après sa raison, ou apprécier ceux qu'il doit appeler au secours de son ignorance." Condorcet, "Sur l'instruction commune pour les hommes," 73-74.

[290] "Le seul souverain des peuples libres, la vérité, dont les hommes de génie sont les ministres, étendra sur l'univers entier sa douce et irrésistible puissance ; par elle tous les hommes apprendront ce qu'ils doivent vouloir pour leur bonheur, et ils ne voudront plus que le bien commun de tous." Condorcet, "Cinquième mémoire. Sur l'instruction relative aux sciences," *Bibliothèque de l'homme public*, 2nd year, vol. 9 (1791): 78-79. For similar claims, see Condorcet, "Sur la nécessité de l'instruction publique" [1793], in *Œuvres de Condorcet*, 7:439. On the idea of a republic of reason, see Keith M. Baker, "Condorcet ou la république de la raison," in *Le siècle de l'avènement républicain*, eds. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 225-55.

shape the agenda the Idéologues after the Terror, and it would also remain one of the axioms of Saint-Simon's social philosophy.

If Condorcet considered that enlightened government might be reconciled with a more democratic politics, it may have been because of the more general assumptions behind his model of human improvement. Indeed, in his view, the reform of public education would simply be the latest development of a broader process of historical development. This was the process which had seen the entire human species gradually improving its scientific knowledge and the propagation of this knowledge, within and across all societies. If knowledge went hand in hand with morality, as Condorcet presumed, this implied that the time for democratic politics would come. As he warned in his "memoirs" on educational reform, this process was nonetheless not inevitable, and it required the establishment of scientific institutions that would consolidate existing knowledge and ensure its continued development.[291] According to Condorcet, it also called for the composition of a monumental history detailing the successive advances of the human mind and showcasing its capacity for further perfection. The *Esquisse* would provide an abbreviated version of this history. It would also contain the final product of his social mathematics: an account of humanity's probable future. This account was the most ambitious attempt to sketch out the prospects of human perfectibility, and it would shape a range of subsequent philosophies of progress.

The Return to Simplicity

Condorcet's *Esquisse* was the apotheosis of his scientific and political career. The product of Condorcet's long-established project of writing a history of the human mind, the *Esquisse* also

[291] "It is therefore a real duty of society to promote the discovery of speculative truths as the sole means of advancing the human race to the successive degrees of perfection, and consequently of happiness, to which nature permits us to aspire. This duty is all the more important because the good can endure only as long as progress is made towards the better. We must either continue toward perfection or run the risk of being dragged back by the constant and inevitable pressure of passions, error and events." Condorcet, "The Nature and Purpose of Public Instruction," 111. In his legislative plan, Condorcet proposed the institution of a national society of arts and sciences. Condorcet, "Rapport et projet de décret sur l'instruction publique," 501-02.

represented the final iteration of his social mathematics. While much of the work focused on improvements in the past, the last and final section addressed Condorcet's hopes and expectations about the future, and it supplied a range of conjectures from an assessment of probability: the likely outcomes of the indefinite perfectibility of individual faculties. This visionary approach inspired the subsequent search for a science of society in France, although later thinkers did not necessarily share the same vision of the future. The Idéologues would build on Condorcet's conception of perfectibility, but they developed different accounts of the origins and features of individuals' moral and intellectual capacities. Saint-Simon, meanwhile, drew heavily on Condorcet's philosophy of history, but he replaced Condorcet's conception of human perfectibility with a more deterministic account of the collective processes at play in the historical development of society. Condorcet's *Esquisse* nonetheless remained a reference work for nineteenth-century social theorists, and its argumentation therefore bears close scrutiny.

Condorcet wrote the *Esquisse* while he was in hiding during the Terror. Composed over the course of several months in 1793, Condorcet conceived of this work as an introduction to the larger history of progress that he began to work on in the 1770s.[292] In the *Esquisse*, he outlined the broad strokes of a philosophy of history that centred on the heroic struggle between truth and error, or enlightenment and superstition. This history built on his belief in the connection between intellectual and moral improvement, and it sought to show that, despite repeated crises and upheavals, the cumulative development of knowledge had contributed to the betterment of conduct and, thus, to greater human happiness. Together, these developments had led to the diffusion of principles that were "more in conformity with reason and nature" and they had brought humanity to what Condorcet considered to be a state of higher perfection. The eighteenth century had also seen the advent of Condorcet's cherished doctrine of perfectibility, a

[292] On the origins and development of this project, see the editors' introduction in Condorcet, *Tableau historique*, 1-80. On the tradition behind this type of history, see Dagen, *L'histoire de l'esprit humain dans la pensée française.*

doctrine which had, he claimed, dealt "the final blow to the already tottering structure of prejudice."[293] The *Esquisse*, Condorcet hoped, would serve as proof of this doctrine and as an impetus for further human improvement.

In line with Condorcet's conception of perfectibility, the *Esquisse* advanced a secular account of human improvement, but with a providential twist. As Condorcet presented it in this work, the main obstacle to human improvement in the course of history was the priestly caste. Repeating a claim earlier advanced by d'Holbach, Condorcet argued that, though priests had been among the first to investigate the natural world, they had also sought to preserve their power by keeping people in a state of ignorance and by propagating myths and falsehoods. To do so, he argued, they had developed a double doctrine and divided society into two classes, "the one destined to teach, the other to believe."[294] A series of innovations had nonetheless spurred the development knowledge in human history, according to Condorcet, and they ensured that truth would inevitably triumph over error. These included the invention of writing (which made it easier to transmit knowledge over time), printing (which widened the human ability to learn and communicate) and the method of analysis, which, discovered by Bacon and developed by Locke, had made it possible to subject every idea to empirical verification. This last invention was of the greatest importance, Condorcet maintained, and it had "forever imposed a barrier between mankind and the errors of its infancy."[295]

Despite his earlier warning that progress was not inevitable, Condorcet in the *Esquisse* presented human improvement as irreversible and bound to prevail. This seeming inevitability followed the providentialism of Turgot, Price and Priestley, and it reflected the consoling picture of progress

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[293] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 101-02.
[294] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 24-27, 31. Compare with d'Holbach, *Essai sur les préjugés*, 257-64. The idea of a "double doctrine" was first popularised by William Warburton, bishop of Gloucester in *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1738-41). On the development of the notion of historical conflict in Condorcet's works, see Jean-Pierre Schandeler, "Condorcet et l'histoire de la raison: La formation de l'idée de conflit," *Sens du devenir et pensée de l'histoire*, 209-26.
[295] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 87-88, 96-97. On the invention of writing, see *Sketch*, 4-5; on printing, 70-71; on method, 96-97, 122.

Condorcet wished to present to his readers in the midst of the Terror.[296] His belief in the capacity for continued improvement also specifically built on the theory of knowledge behind his social mathematics. As Condorcet explained, in the tenth and last chapter of the *Esquisse*:

> If man can, with almost complete assurance, predict phenomena when he knows their laws, and if, even when he does not, he can with high probability forecast the events of the future on the basis of his experience of the past, why, then, should it be regarded as a fantastic undertaking to sketch, with some pretence to truth, the future destiny of man on the basis of his history? The sole foundation for belief in the natural sciences is this idea, that the general laws directing the phenomena of the universe, known or unknown, are necessary and constant. Why should this principle be any less true for the development of the intellectual and moral faculties of man than for the other operations of nature?[297]

The possibility of predicting the human future, according to Condorcet, relied on the same principles of certainty as the natural sciences: if it was feasible to predict the operations of natural phenomena, when their general laws were known, then it was possible to achieve similar results for human society. As Condorcet went on to suggest, it was therefore reasonable for a philosopher to put forward conjectures about the prospective developments of humanity, as long as he did not "attribute to them a certainty superior to that warranted by the number, the constancy and the accuracy of his observations." Condorcet's faith in the future improvement of the human condition was, in other words, the result of a probability forecast.

Condorcet organised his predictions about the future into three broad fields. He suggested, firstly, that recent events in France and North America foreshadowed the gradual emancipation of all peoples and "the abolition of inequality between nations." Lauding the principles of the French constitution in particular, Condorcet insisted that every society would see the rise of political liberty, of a respect for individual rights and of the civilisation of manners, and he argued that this process would see the abolition of slavery, the institution of free trade and the

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[296] See his peroration: "How consoling for the philosopher who laments the errors, the crimes, the injustices which still pollute the earth and of which he is often the victim is this view of the human race, emancipated from its shackles, released from the empire of chance from that of the enemies of its progress, advancing with a firm and sure step along the path of truth, virtue and happiness!" *Sketch*, 147.
[297] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 125-26.

decline of religions worldwide.[298] The second set of developments related more specifically to what Condorcet called "the progress of equality within a single people." These included greater equality in the distribution of wealth, which would naturally follow, he claimed, from the establishment of free trade and industry in a particular society. This progress would also result, he argued, from the institution of social insurance schemes, intended to curtail the effects of chance and inherited wealth on personal circumstances, as well as from the reform of public education, which would promote moral independence and the convergence of individual capacities.[299]

The last and most important component of Condorcet's futurology related to the perfection of individual faculties. As previously mentioned, Condorcet projected that the human mind may not necessarily increase in strength, but he insisted that the tools facilitating learning could be perfected in such a way that the mass of knowledge individuals could absorb ceaselessly increased. These tools included the instruments that were employed in different branches of knowledge, the language that was used to fix and determine ideas and the methods whose improvement increased "at once the force and the speed" of intellectual operations. The perfection of those tools, according to Condorcet, would not only improve the range and precision of the facts in different areas of study. They would also assist individual minds in learning "how to classify" those facts, in expressing the relations between them "more simply" and in presenting them "in such a way that it is possible to grasp a greater number of them with the same degree of intellectual ability and the same amount of application."[300] The capacity for unlimited intellectual improvement was thus contingent, in his view, on the potential for

[298] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 126-30.
[299] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 130-34.
[300] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 134-35. These improvements, according to Condorcet, would see the more extension application of "the calculus of combinations and probabilities" to moral and political questions, as well as the establishment of a "universal language" of science. *Sketch*, 138-39, 143-44.

individuals of equal ability to grasp a greater range of complex ideas in simpler and more straightforward ways.

A similar process was at work in moral science, the perfection of which was crucial to Condorcet's model of human improvement. The development of this science and the implementation of its precepts in public education would indeed reduce "the violence of [human] passions," he claimed, and further the diffusion of habits of conscience and self-reflection in society.[301] Those developments would, in turn, promote the convergence of moral sentiments. As Condorcet queried:

> Will not the free man's sense of his own dignity and a system of education built upon a deeper knowledge of our moral constitution, render common to almost every man those principles of strict and unsullied justice, those habits of an active and enlightened benevolence, of a delicate and generous sensibility which nature has implanted in the hearts of all and whose flowering waits only upon the favourable influences of enlightenment and freedom?[302]

With the support of enlightenment and freedom, the perfection of moral science and the betterment of individual conduct it entailed would, according to Condorcet, disseminate the simple sentiments that flowed from humans' innate moral faculties. This view, which aligned with the moral philosophy of Sophie de Grouchy, illustrated Condorcet's belief in the connection between intellectual and moral improvement. It also pointed to what he envisioned as the end of human perfectibility.

Michael Sonenscher has recently suggested that Condorcet's conception of perfectibility was oriented towards the convergence of individual capacities of mind, and that this conception shaped the state-based account of political legitimacy and fiscal redistribution Condorcet advanced in the early 1790s.[303] The views he developed in the *Esquisse* show that Condorcet also went one step further and that he looked to the convergence, not simply of intellectual, but also

[301] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 139-40.
[302] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 140.
[303] Sonenscher, "Sociability, Perfectibility and the Intellectual Legacy of Rousseau," 690-94.

of moral capabilities. This convergence centred on the diffusion of natural sentiments of justice, benevolence and sensibility, and it was the foundation for the visionary account of human perfection he developed in the last section of the *Esquisse*'s tenth chapter. For Condorcet, the convergence of moral capabilities would lead to the end of violent conflicts between states and further the emergence of a pacified world characterised by principles of equity, the pursuit of common interests and the disappearance of national animosities.[304] This process of moral convergence would not only be the product of the diffusion of knowledge. It would also be, to return to an earlier theme, the specific result of the advent of sexual equality and of the development of the domestic virtues that were acquired and perfected within the family.[305]

As previously discussed, Condorcet considered the family to be the original site of human sociability and, throughout his works, promoted the moral and intellectual equality of men and women. In the tenth chapter of the *Esquisse*, Condorcet built on these beliefs and insisted that human perfection was a condition of "the complete annihilation of the prejudices that have brought about an inequality of rights between the sexes." This inequality originated in "an abuse of strength," he argued, and the destruction of the prejudices that it sustained would "add to the happiness of family life" and "encourage the practice of the domestic virtues," those, he emphasised, "on which all other virtues are based." According to Condorcet, the equality of the sexes would thus remove one of the main causes of "injustice, cruelty and crime." It would also contribute to the regeneration of moral sentiments and produce what, as he described, "has until now been no more than a dream." This dream was the establishment of "national manners"

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[304] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 140-41.

[305] As noted by Michael Sonenscher, in the introduction of the *Esquisse*, Condorcet put forward an abbreviated account of the origins of human perfectibility that centred on the social effects of a specific kind of commodity surplus. This account followed the stadial theory of progress earlier developed by Turgot, but Condorcet made one crucial change to Turgot's account. Along with eliding the postlapsarian framing of this account, Condorcet tied the origins of commodity surplus to the institution of property inheritance. For Turgot, it was the surplus generated by agricultural production in general that spurred the emergence of commercial exchange and other, related developments. In Condorcet's version, it was the practice of passing property over to one's family that gave rise to the surplus that hastened the speed of progress. Condorcet, *Sketch*, 3-4; Turgot, "Plan des discours sur l'histoire universelle," 223; *Réflexions sur la formation et la distribution des richesses* (N.p., [1766]), §II.

characterised by "mildness and purity" and formed by those "freely contracted habits" that were "inspired by nature and acknowledged by reason."[306] A peaceful world, he conjectured, would result from the moral perfection induced by the domestic virtues of the family and the equality of men and women.

Emma Rothschild aptly describes the idyll outlined in Condorcet's *Esquisse* as one of "universal domesticity."[307] It was, it could also be said, one of moral simplicity. The model of human improvement Condorcet put forward in this work looked to the perfection of individual conduct and the ensuing elimination of violent conflict between people and nations. Like the progress of knowledge, Condorcet associated the betterment of conduct with the ability for individuals to enlarge their moral relations to the whole of humanity yet simplify the sentiments that shaped those relations. This process involved dispelling the complex webs of passion, prejudice and oppression that had subjugated societies for centuries and replacing them with the simple sentiments made possible by the sensitive, rational and moral constitution of every human being.[308] This was the reason why the family, for Condorcet, was so important. Greater human happiness did not simply call for the reform of economic and political institutions, as Sieyès maintained; it also involved the consolidation of the moral bond that joined all of humanity together. This bond was first developed in the family, and it required very little artifice. As Condorcet described it, in a letter to his daughter written shortly before his death, it was "the simple benevolence by which nature has linked us to every member of our species."[309]

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[306] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 141.
[307] Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 211.
[308] According to Condorcet, this rational and moral constitution was the foundation of individual rights: "After long periods of error, after being led astray by vague or incomplete theories, publicists have at last discovered the true rights of man and how they can all be deduced from the single truth: that man is a sentient being, capable of reasoning and of acquiring moral ideas." *Sketch*, 92.
[309] Condorcet, "Advice to his daughter" [1794], in *Political Writings*, 199.

In the last pages of the *Esquisse*, Condorcet opened one final window into human perfectibility. It was possible, he suggested, that the capacity for indefinite improvement was a feature not only of intellectual and moral faculties, but of physical ones too. Indeed, he argued that the development of medical science and hygiene would lead to better health and longer lives and, although "man will not become immortal," it was possible to assume that the average human lifespan would continually increase, as long as "we do not know what the limit is which it can never exceed."[310] Condorcet also speculated that the perfectibility of minds and bodies could be transmitted from generation to generation. Citing the example of animal breeding, he suggested that improvements in "the strength, dexterity and acuteness of our senses" or in "the power of the brain, the ardour of the soul or the moral sensibility" might alter human organisation in such a way that parents would be able to pass those improvements on to their children. Although Condorcet presented these ideas as mere conjectures, he remarked that "analogy, investigation of the human faculties and the study of certain facts" gave those conjectures substance and pushed back "the boundaries of our hopes."[311]

Condorcet thus concluded the *Esquisse* with remarks that recalled the naturalistic foundations of his conception of perfectibility. Those remarks were also significant in that they pointed to what would become an important theme in the later search for a science of society in France, first in the works of the Idéologue thinkers Cabanis, and then in the writings of Saint-Simon and his followers. Following Condorcet, these theorists would pay close attention to the physical attributes of the human species and to the ways in which these shaped or constrained the capacity for individual improvement. While Cabanis would focus on the relations between individual mind and body, in the tradition of the eighteenth-century science of man, Saint-Simon and his followers would seek to build on the evolutionary theories of nature that emerged in the

[310] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 145-46.
[311] Condorcet, *Sketch*, 146-47. Condorcet developed similar ideas in "Fragment sur l'Atlantide, ou efforts combinés de l'espèce humaine pour le progrès des sciences," in *Œuvres complètes*, 8:552-58.

early nineteenth century. These thinkers were all inspired by Condorcet's paean to human improvement, but none would retain the boundless optimism of his conception of perfectibility. The violence and upheaval of the years of the French Revolution would strike a fatal blow to Condorcet's unfettered hopes, and the Terror would mark a caesura in the search for a science of society in eighteenth-century France.

In less direct but no less significant ways, later theorists would revise and adapt Condorcet's social science by drawing on Sieyès' alternative model of improvement. As previously mentioned, the Idéologues developed approaches similarly predicated on a sensationist analysis of individual faculties, while Saint-Simon drew on Sieyès' emphasis on the harmonising effects of the division of labour. In different ways, positivism and early French socialism would both, in turn, be constructed on the basis of original syntheses of Sieyèsian political economy and Condorcet's grand visions of the future. If Saint-Simon's followers saw themselves as the heirs of Condorcet, however, they did not typically hold Sieyès in the same regard. This was the case, in part, because of his more obtuse conceptions. It was also because his intellectual legacy was filtered through the works of a range of other thinkers, and in the first instance through the works of the Idéologues. Following one contemporary commentator, Sieyès was after all "the founder of the new school of metaphysicians" that emerged in France in the late 1790s.[312] The two main figures in this school are the subject of the next chapter.

[312] Amaury-Duval, "Sciences et arts," in *Statistique générale et particulière de la France et de ses colonies* (Paris, an XII [1803]), 3:68.

3 – Two Versions of *idéologie*: Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis

The end of the Terror inaugurated a new phase in the search for a science of society in France. Following a period of political violence and social unrest, republican reformers sought to move away from perceived Jacobin excesses and stabilise French society. This led to the introduction of a new system of government – the Directory – which consolidated individual rights, but further limited political participation on the basis of wealth, education and sex.[313] The desire for social and political stabilisation was also the catalyst for the rise of the loose group of writers, thinkers and legislators known as the Idéologues. Named after the term introduced by Antoine Destutt de Tracy to describe his new "science of ideas" (*idéologie*), the Idéologues coalesced around the project of devising a secular system of knowledge and morality grounded in sensationist principles. This project was conceived as an extension of the philosophies of Locke, Condillac and Helvétius, among others, but it was also intended to perfect the earlier attempts to construct a science of society. It was nonetheless split between two scientific projects, and these would shape distinct models of human improvement in the late 1790s.

These project swere developed by the Idéologues' two leading theorists, Antoine Destutt de Tracy and Pierre Cabanis. A former noble turned revolutionary, Destutt de Tracy outlined the principles of his science of ideas, *idéologie*, with a view to giving a more secure foundation to moral and political science. Drawing on the approaches of Condillac and Helvétius, he argued that sensitive impressions were the sole source of knowledge and that acquiring an accurate understanding of phenomena was a function of the capacity to compare between sensations through the artifice of language. He also insisted that human behaviour was primarily determined by mental dispositions and abilities, not physical attributes, and that individuals were primarily

313 Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution after Robespierre*, transl. Michel Petheram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); *1795: pour une République sans Révolution*, eds. Roger Dupuy and Marcel Morabito (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1996); Marc Belissa and Yannick Bosc, *Le Directoire. La République sans la démocratie* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2018).

driven by self-interest and not endowed with a natural capacity for compassion or sympathy. On this basis, Destutt de Tracy suggested that the stabilisation of French society after the Terror could be achieved through the cultivation of good judgement in the citizenry, and that this required the reform of language, the inculcation of virtuous habits through the proper administration of laws and the consolidation of power of an intellectual elite trained in the precepts of *idéologie*.

A physician trained in the Montpellier tradition of eighteenth-century medicine, Cabanis sought to develop a science of man and further its application to the knowledge of individual mind and conduct. Unlike Destutt de Tracy, he argued that human behaviour was shaped and often determined by an individual's distinct and variegated physical attributes and that the interdependence of mind and body, or what he termed the "physical" and the "moral," called for an equivalent interdependence of the science of physiology, the analysis of ideas and moral philosophy. Cabanis insisted that individuals had a capacity for both physical and intellectual perfectibility and that, since bodily vigour bolstered mental capabilities, the first was crucial to the second. Although he revived justifications of sexual inequality, he also followed Condorcet and Sophie de Grouchy and claimed that humans were endowed with a natural capacity for compassion and sympathy, arguing that this capacity was closely connected to the development of knowledge. Cabanis applied these ideas under the Directory by proposing the establishment of a programme of hygienic reform, the cultivation of the moral sentiments of the citizenry and, in contrast to Destutt de Tracy, the dissemination of the precepts of *idéologie* throughout society.

This chapter argues that, despite certain shared commitments, Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis developed different conceptions of perfectibility in the late 1790s on the back of contrasting epistemologies and moral philosophies. In tune with the republican centre after the Terror, they sought a remedy to social and political turmoil by promoting virtuous conduct in the French

citizenry.[314] They were both proponents of *idéologie* under the Directory, and they followed other theorists in this period in calling for the enlightened reform of society and politics on the basis of a sensationist theory of knowledge.[315] They nonetheless put forward different scientific projects, and they conceived of human perfectibility in distinct and opposing ways. Destutt de Tracy argued that there was a uniform relationship between individual thought and behaviour, but he underlined the need to distinguish between the mental abilities of the governing elite and of the popular masses. Cabanis emphasised the variability of sensitive experience, as well as the natural inequality of certain human traits, yet maintained that educational and hygienic reforms could further the levelling of capacities in society. Human perfectibility, according to the former, involved a transformation from convergent beginnings to divergent ends. For the latter, it involved the reverse.

The Idéologues have long been considered key figures in early French social science, and they are seen as crucial in the transition from eighteenth to nineteenth-century models of improvement. Typically, they have been associated with the move towards more technocratic approaches, divorced from ideas of rights, and paving the way for the more deterministic conceptions of social organisation developed by Saint-Simon and his followers after the French Revolution.[316] This chapter adds nuance to those interpretations. It brings to light that the Idéologues developed at least two distinct models of human improvement and that neither of these fits neatly into those characterisations of their thought. As I argue in chapter four, Saint-Simon built on Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis' visions of social and scientific reform, but he

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[314] Martin S. Staum, *Minerva's Message: Stabilizing the French Revolution* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University press, 1996); James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror*.

[315] On the Idéologues, see François Picavet, *Les Idéologues: essai sur l'histoire des idées et des théories scientifiques, philosophiques, religieuses, etc. en France depuis 1789* (Paris, 1891); Sergio Moravia, *Il pensiero degli Ideologues: Scienza e filosofia in Francia (1780-1815)* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1974); Georges Gusdorf, *Les sciences humaines et la pensée occidentale*, vol. 8, *La conscience révolutionnaire. Les Idéologues* (Paris: Payot, 1978); Welch, *Liberty and Utility*; *L'institution de la raison: la révolution culturelle des Idéologues*, ed. François Azouvi (Paris: Vrin, 1992).

[316] For standard interpretations, see Baker, "Closing the French Revolution: Saint-Simon and Comte"; Welch, "Social Science from the French Revolution to Positivism"; Wokler, "Ideology and the Origins of Social Science."

objected to their political ideals in general, and to their conception of perfectibility in particular, and revised their approach by drawing on the ideas of the Theocrats. It was in this way that Saint-Simon shifted the focus of the search for a science of society from individual to collective patterns of human development and laid the foundations for early positivist and socialist thought.

This chapter builds on existing studies of the ideas of Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis, but it provides an original interpretation of the relationship between them.[317] It does so in order to illuminate the changing and contested models of human improvement that characterised the search of a science of society in the late eighteenth century. Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis are usually taken to have developed complementary projects of reform under the Directory.[318] Through a close reading of the works in which they first articulated these projects, I argue that they were in fact based on different principles. Although Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis sometimes stressed the affinity between their approaches, and the former brought his ideas closer to those of the latter in the early nineteenth century, they promoted distinct models of improvement in the late 1790s. They did so in ways that reworked Sieyès' metaphysics of the self as well as Condorcet's conception of perfectibility. Developed in the aftermath of the Terror, these approaches were nonetheless shaped by a greater distrust in the unmediated political agency of the citizenry, and they each emphasised the need to reshape the ideas, sentiments and passions of individual citizens to further social harmony in a newly established republican polity.[319]

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317 On Destutt de Tracy, see Emmet Kennedy, *A Philosophe in the Age of Revolution: Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of Ideology* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978); Brian W. Head, *Ideology and Social Science: Destutt de Tracy and French Liberalism* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1985). On Cabanis, see Martin S. Staum, *Cabanis: Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Mariana Saad, *Cabanis, comprendre l'homme pour changer le monde* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016); Claude Jolly, *Cabanis. L'idéologie physiologique* (Paris: Vrin, 2021).

318 In the latest iteration of this view, Claude Jolly, for instance, maintains that, despite some differences, Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy "sont en parfait accord sur l'essentiel." Jolly, *Cabanis*, 11.

319 On this growing distrust of politics, see Wokler, "Ideology and the Origins of Social Science," 695-701.

This chapter begins by examining the scientific projects Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis respectively promoted in the early years of the Directory – the science of ideas and the science of man. These projects were developed as responses to contemporary social and political predicaments, but, as I show, they were based on divergent theories of knowledge. I then examine Destutt de Tracy's model of human improvement in more detail by analysing his philosophy of mind and his moral theory, before describing how this model shaped the proposals for reform he put forward in an essay, composed in the late 1790s, on how to further public morality in French society. Turning to Cabanis, I investigate his conception of perfectibility by exploring the principles of his physiological science of man as well as his plan for hygienic reform. This is followed by an analysis of Cabanis' own understanding of *idéologie*, and the ways in which it differed from Destutt de Tracy's. The chapter ends with a brief account of the intellectual legacies of their thought after the coup of 18 Brumaire in 1799.

The Science of Ideas and the Science of Man

Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis were political allies during the French Revolution, and they met regularly at the salon of M^me^ Helvétius with a group of like-minded intellectuals and reformers.[320] Following a career in the military, Destutt de Tracy was elected as a member of the noble constituency to the Estates-General in 1789, before joining the National Assembly and the Société de 1789, the political club of Sieyès and Condorcet. A critic of slavery, he supported extending individual rights to emancipated blacks in the colony of Saint-Domingue and he defended the French Revolution against Edmund Burke's attacks.[321] An opponent of the Jacobins, he was imprisoned during the Terror but escaped the guillotine and was released in October 1794.[322] Born into a wealthy family from the Limousin, Cabanis trained as a doctor in

[320] On the salon of M^me^ Helvétius, see Guillois, *Le salon de Madame Helvétius*.
[321] *Opinion de M. de Tracy, sur les affaires de Saint-Domingue en septembre 1791* ([Paris], 1791); *M. de Tracy à M. Burke* ([Paris], 1790).
[322] Kennedy, *Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of Ideology*, 1-37.

the 1780s. He was the personal physician of Mirabeau, and he became involved in the administration of public hospitals in Paris in the early years of the Revolution. Close to Sieyès and Condorcet, he withdrew from public life during the Terror.[323] After Thermidor, both men resumed their involvement in public affairs and became leading theoreticians in the cultural and intellectual movement associated with *idéologie*.

As is well documented, the rise of the loose group of thinkers who came to be known as the Idéologues reflected the particular social and political situation facing republican reformers after Thermidor. The Terror had unleashed public passions, fostered political violence and threatened the moral cohesion of French society. Following the fall of Robespierre, reformers sought to find ways to pacify public opinion and consolidate republican government through the regeneration of individual conduct, pursuing a programme by which society could, as it were, be "made republican."[324] This aspiration was behind the creation of a range of scientific and educational institutions in the second half of the 1790s. These included the short-lived École normale of 1795, which delivered courses to future schoolteachers inspired by Condillac's philosophy of mind, the Institut national des sciences et des arts in Paris, which brought together leading French intellectuals and scientists across a range of disciplines and invited them to share their research with each other and with the public, and the Écoles centrales (1795-1802), schools that provided free education devoid of religious instruction to secondary-level students in every *département*.[325]

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[323] Jolly, *Cabanis*, 15-68. Cabanis married Charlotte de Grouchy, the sister of Sophie de Grouchy. He also allegedly helped Condorcet hide after his arrest was decreed in July 1793. His friendship with Sieyès is evidenced by the warm and affectionate letters he wrote to him. See Archives nationales 284 AP/8 (1792); Archives nationales 284 AP/12 (1798).

[324] Howard Brown, *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice, and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 29. See also Jainchill, "The Post-Terror Discourse of Mœurs," chap. 2 in *Reimagining politics after the Terror*; Livesey, "Learning to be Free: The Educational System of the Commercial Republic," chap. 5 in *Making Democracy in the French Revolution*.

[325] Bronislaw Baczko, "Le tournant culturel de l'an III," in *1795, pour une république sans révolution*, 17-37. See also Palmer, "Modernization: The Paths of Progress," chap. 6 in *Improvement of Humanity*. On the Institut national, see Jean-Luc Chappey, "Usages et enjeux politiques d'une métaphorisation de l'espace savant en Révolution. "L'Encyclopédie vivante," de la République thermidorienne à l'Empire," *Politix* 48, no. 4 (1999): 37-69.

As a group, the Idéologues were broadly united by the idea that social pacification and republican reform required the reconstitution of moral and political science on the basis of sensationist principles. Those principles were the only stable foundation of knowledge, they believed, and it was thus imperative to perfect contemporary understandings of human beliefs, norms and values on their basis. This project had its origins in eighteenth-century theoretical constructs, and it combined Locke and Condillac's philosophies of mind with Helvétius' approach to moral and political reform. Its emphasis on the need to derive a science of society from an analysis of individual faculties meant that it also built on Sieyès' metaphysics of the self, even though the Idéologues were typically averse to "metaphysical" forms of speculation.[326] More so than Sieyès, however, the Idéologues sought to popularise their ideas in society, and their approach was inspired by Condorcet's vision of moral and intellectual regeneration through public education.[327] Although they did not pursue the project of a social mathematics, they saw themselves as the heirs of the ideal of human perfectibility lauded in the *Esquisse* by Condorcet, whose tragic fate at the hands of the Terror cemented his position as a visionary thinker in the minds of Thermidorian republicans.[328]

The Idéologues were nonetheless split between two scientific projects. Both of these were presented at the class on moral and political science at the newly created Institut national. In *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser* (1798), based on a series of lectures delivered between 1796 and

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[326] As previously mentioned, Sieyès was described as "the founder of the new school of metaphysicians" that emerged in France in the late 1790s. Amaury-Duval, "Sciences et arts," 68. Likewise, one scholar calls Sieyès the "godfather of *idéologie*." Wokler, "Ideology and the Origins of Social Science," 695.

[327] As one of the theorists associated with the Idéologues maintained, the "regeneration of human understanding" had to be a central objective of education reform because the tool of "analysis" was "indispensable in a great democracy." [Dominique-Joseph Garat], "Rapport sur l'établissement des Écoles normales du 2 brumaire, l'an III" [1794], in *Une education pour la démocratie. Textes et projets de l'époque révolutionnaire*, ed. Bronislaw Baczko (Paris: Garnier, 1982), 479-80.

[328] Condorcet's *Esquisse* was published and circulated by order of the Convention nationale in 1795. In the motion to publish the text, Pierre Daunou insisted that Condorcet's work showed that perfecting "the social state" was the human mind's "most noble activity" and he stressed that students who studied the text would learn to "cherish liberty" and to "hate and conquer all tyrannies." "Discours de Daunou du 13 germinal an III," cited in Condorcet, *Tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, 1127. See also Jean-Pierre Schandeler, *Les interprétations de Condorcet: Symboles et concepts (1794-1894)* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000), 13-102.

1798, Destutt de Tracy maintained that it was by studying "the formation of our ideas" that it would be possible to lend a "stable and certain basis" to the moral and political sciences.[329] The science of ideas was first in the "genealogical order" of knowledge, he argued, because "nothing exists for us without the ideas that we have," and the ideas we possess constituted our "whole being," if not "existence itself." This science could also be said to be "the only science," he claimed, as it was the foundation for all branches of study. Further to this, Destutt de Tracy maintained that all areas of applied knowledge were likewise contingent upon the science of ideas. This included the art "of shaping human habits, education," the art of "regulating our desires, morality" and "the greatest of arts" which was "that of ordering society in such a way that man receives the greatest possible assistance and experiences the least possible inconvenience from his fellow kind," the social art.[330]

Destutt de Tracy coined the term *idéologie* to highlight the new and original nature of his approach. In contrast to traditional metaphysics, but also to Condillac's approach, which presumed the existence of a soul, Destutt de Tracy argued that *idéologie* would be grounded in purely secular and empirical principles: it would deal with the analysis of sensory impressions and it would be concerned with the uniform development of the faculties of the mind without regard to "first causes."[331] The science of ideas, he also claimed, could be divided into two parts, one of which was "physiological" and the other "rational." The first of these nonetheless required "vast expertise," he argued, and "in the present state of knowledge" it could only be expected to produce "scattered" and "poorly connected" results. The second, in contrast, necessitated "less science," and it was sufficiently advanced to form a "complete system" with "more direct applications." If Destutt de Tracy thus alluded to the possibility of a physiological *idéologie*, he

[329] Antoine Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," *Mémoires de l'Institut national des sciences et des arts. Sciences morales et politiques*, vol. 1 (Paris, Thermidor an VI [1798]), 285-86.
[330] Destutt de Tracy supported these claims by citing the work of the late Antoine Lavoisier, who had developed a chemical nomenclature that drew on Condillac's philosophy of language. "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 286-87.
[331] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 322-26.

dismissed its feasibility and insisted that only its rational side was currently practicable. It was, by implication, the only type of *idéologie* that could support the reconstitution of moral and political science, and thus contribute to contemporary efforts at social stabilisation and republican reform.[332]

Cabanis outlined a different approach. In a parallel set of lectures between 1796 and 1797, he argued that the "physical knowledge of man" should be the basis for philosophy and moral science. Setting out the content of the work he intended to present at the Institut national, Cabanis explained in his first lecture that, by examining the relationship between bodily functions and intellectual processes, as well as between the development of physical organs and individual sentiments and passions, it would become clear that "physiology, the analysis of ideas and moral science are but three branches of one and only science." This science, he argued, could "rightly be called *the science of man*" (emphasis in the original).[333] Cabanis went on to explain that physical sensibility was the "last term" in the "study of the phenomena of life," and that it was the "most general principle" furnished by the "analysis of intellectual faculties and of the affections of the soul." It could therefore be said, he continued, that the "physical" and the "moral," that is to say, bodily functions and mental states, were "combined at their source" or that "the moral is only the physical considered from certain particular viewpoints."[334]

In a similar fashion to Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis promoted the refoundation of moral and philosophical knowledge on the basis of sensationist principles. Unlike his colleague at the Institut national, however, he emphasised the value of research into human physiology. Destutt

[332] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 344-45. Destutt de Tracy did refer to Cabanis' "beautiful research" into human physiology in a footnote, but this was presumably added in the revised version of his work that was published in 1798. "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 289, n. 1.
[333] Pierre Cabanis, "Considérations générales sur l'étude de l'homme, et sur les rapports de son organisation physique avec ses facultés intellectuelles et morales," *Mémoires de l'Institut national*, 1:40-41.
[334] Cabanis, "Considérations générales sur l'étude de l'homme," 64. On the origins and development of the distinction between the physical and the moral in the eighteenth-century science of man in France, see Williams, *The Physical and the Moral*.

de Tracy's focus was on examining the origins and development of the faculties of the human mind, without regard to physical variations. Destutt de Tracy also described *idéologie* as a project that would serve to purify different branches of knowledge, including the science of society. Cabanis, in contrast, presented the science of man as a branch of study concerned with the physiological foundations of sensitive experience and the interconnectedness of the "physical" and the "moral." He promoted this project, in his Institut national lectures, as one that would not only obviate the need for a belief in a spiritual soul, as Condillac had supposed, but that would also undermine the claim that individuals were born with equal capacities of mind, as had been suggested by Helvétius. By drawing on the science of human physiology, Cabanis maintained, it would be possible to correct the mistakes of sensationist psychology and metaphysics.[335] It would also be possible, he argued, to outline practical ways of "perfecting human nature."[336]

Despite their conceptual affinities, Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis put forward different scientific projects at the Institut national, and they did do on the basis of distinct epistemologies. Destutt de Tracy argued that human knowledge originated in sensitive experience, but he emphasised the primacy of ideas in shaping individual mind and conduct. Cabanis claimed that moral and intellectual dispositions were shaped in significant ways by physical processes. Destutt de Tracy's science of ideas thus presumed a distinction between mind and body, while Cabanis' science of man assumed their connection and interdependence. This distinction would shape the different models of human improvement they developed under the Directory. For Destutt de Tracy, the primacy of ideas meant that social stabilisation required the reform of the individual for rational evaluation through the cultivation of good judgement. Cabanis argued that the interdependence of mind and body pointed to the need to combine physical, moral and intellectual types of

[335] Cabanis, "Considérations générales sur l'étude de l'homme," 63.
[336] Cabanis, "Histoire physiologique des sensations," *Mémoires de l'Institut national*, 1:98-99.

improvement. While Destutt de Tracy's conception of human perfectibility was essentially cognitive or "idealist" in nature, Cabanis' was physiological and vitalist.

This distinction has usually been overlooked by historians. Part of the reason for this is that Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis belonged to a similarly minded group of reformers in the late 1790s, and they stressed the complementary nature of their projects in their time. It is also because Destutt de Tracy revised his approach in the early nineteenth century and brought it more in line with Cabanis'.[337] Close examination of the works in which they first articulated their projects nonetheless brings to light important differences between them. These differences lend weight to the claim that the Idéologues did not propound "a homogeneous system of thought," but rather that their ideas constituted "a field of debate."[338] It also points to the different models of human improvement that characterised the search for a science of society after the Terror. Following the discussions examined in the previous chapters, the models developed by Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis in the late eighteenth century were the culmination of long-running debates over the nature of physical sensibility, the range of abilities with which individuals were naturally endowed and the range and features of human perfectibility. Whether they recognised it or not, Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis set out different visions of moral and intellectual regeneration under the Directory.

From Convergence to Divergence

The model of human improvement Destutt de Tracy formulated in the late 1790s derived from the analysis he developed, under the banner of a rational *idéologie*, in *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*. This analysis had both a descriptive and prescriptive component. Destutt de Tracy first sought to

[337] For expressions of the affinity of their projects, see Destutt de Tracy, *Projet d'élémens d'idéologie* (Paris, an IX [1800]), 353-54; "De la métaphysique de Kant," *Mémoires de l'Institut national des sciences et des arts. Sciences morales et politiques*, vol. 4 (Paris, Vendémiaire an XI [1802]), 604; *Élémens d'idéologie. Troisième partie. Logique* (Paris, an XIII [1805]), v-viii, 203, n. 1*; Élémens d'idéologie. IV^e et V^e parties. Traité de la volonté et de ses effets* (Paris, 1815), 555; Cabanis, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, 2 vols. (Paris, an XIII [1805]), 1:xvi, n. 1.
[338] Pierre Macherey, "La naissance de l'Idéologie (1796)," in *Études de philosophie "française": de Sieyès à Barni* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013), 83.

show that, although there was a continuity between physical and intellectual processes in individuals, there existed higher and lower levels of cognition. He also maintained that there was a uniform relationship between human thought and behaviour and there were universal principles of reason, but that individuals were naturally driven by selfish interests. Destutt de Tracy then identified the processes that shaped the human capacity for rational evaluation, and he suggested ways in which these could be altered to perfect individual judgements and further the development of knowledge. Human perfectibility, for Destutt de Tracy, was a condition of the capacity to acquire an accurate and precise understanding of phenomena, and this capacity could be improved in two ways: the reform of language and the perfection of mental habits. I outline below the principles of Destutt de Tracy's rational *idéologie*, before moving on to the proposals for reform he developed on that basis.

The Foundations of Perfectibility

The science of ideas Destutt de Tracy developed in *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser* was based on an account of the development of the faculties of the individual mind. Following Condillac, he argued that the faculty of sensibility was the first component of human thought and that simple sensations were "the stock out of which we derive all our knowledge."[339] While Condillac was committed to the spirituality of the human soul and rejected the principle of causation between material and intellectual phenomena, however, Destutt de Tracy maintained that physical movement was the efficient cause of human knowledge. It was movement, he claimed, that allowed individuals to experience different perceptions, to compare between them and to develop a sense of self.[340] The ability to compare sensations was also the basis of the faculty of

[339] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 330. Destutt de Tracy later remarked that in developing these arguments he composed his own "treatise on sensations, without having had the intention of doing." "Dissertation sur quelques questions d'idéologie," in *Mémoires de l'Institut national*, 3:502.
[340] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 300-10, 328-30. He later associated the emergence of a sense of self with the resistance individuals experienced in their movements and proclaimed that "resisting is existing." Destutt de Tracy, "Dissertation sur l'existence et sur les hypotheses de Mallebranche et de Berkeley à ce sujet," in *Mémoires de l'Institut national*, 3:530; *Traité de la volonté*, 72-74.

judgement, he argued, and it was the operations of this faculty, in turn, that enabled the formation of "complex ideas" and thus the development of knowledge. The last faculty to emerge, according to Destutt de Tracy, was the faculty of the will, and it was the product of the ability to choose between pleasurable and painful sensations. This ability, in his view, was the source of all human passions and sentiments.[341]

Although he presented physical and intellectual processes as causally connected, Destutt de Tracy insisted that there was a distinction between higher and lower levels of individual cognition. This distinction would be crucial to his conception of morality, as well as to his model of human improvement. Following Condillac, Destutt de Tracy suggested that individual needs set in motion the operations of the mind. He argued that there was nonetheless a difference between the "simple needs" that were "the direct product of our organisation," on the one hand, and the forms of action impelled by "desire," which were the effect of a "complex idea." In his view, the mental activity produced by simple needs preceded reasoning, and it led to "simple perceptions" and "pure sentiments" which were practically the same as "sensation itself." The actions produced by desire, in contrast, reflected the "higher order" ability of comparing between sensations, that is to say, they were the product of the operations of the faculty of judgement.[342] Whilst he did not subscribe to Condillac's dualist metaphysics, Destutt de Tracy in this way reintroduced a distinction between the physical and intellectual dimensions of human nature and, more specifically, between simple and more complex forms of human cognition.

Destutt de Tracy's account of the faculties of the human mind echoed Sieyès' metaphysics of the self. Like Sieyès, Destutt de Tracy sought to circumvent traditional philosophical questions associated with the attributes of material and spiritual substances and obviate the intractable

[341] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 337-51.
[342] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 354.

question of "first causes."[343] Sieyès had developed an approach that emphasised the progressive nature of individual experience and, drawing on Leibniz, the dynamic relationship between the simple and complex facets of human reality. Destutt de Tracy proposed a stricter separation between the lower and higher orders of the mind, based on the distinction between simple needs and complex desires. While the first were the immediate product of sensitive experience, he claimed, the second were shaped by the choices and preferences produced by the faculty of judgement. This meant that individual desires were, he argued, "always precisely proportioned to our knowledge, whether false or correct." Crucially, it also meant that "to direct and rectify our desires," it was necessary to "rectify our judgements." There was, in other words, a uniform and constant relationship between thought and behaviour, and it was possible to modify human conduct by altering the rational evaluations made by individual minds. According to Destutt de Tracy, this was the "only solid foundation of moral science."[344]

The practical implications of these ideas were brought out in the analysis of human sociability Destutt de Tracy set out in *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*. Having defined the nature of human desire, Destutt de Tracy went on to outline some of the different objects that gave rise to it. The type of desire that emerged in relation to other human beings was especially significant. According to Destutt de Tracy, once individuals recognised that "other beings" were endowed with the same faculty of will as them, they became aware that the desires of others could either conform or conflict with their own. He argued that this compelled them to want the will of others to align with their own. This was the case, he explained, because:

> … in a living being, its will is the property which we want to possess, in the same way as we want to possess the smell of a flower, or the taste of a fruit. It is [this will] that is the precise object of our desire, and which produces our pleasure or pain, depending on whether we are able to share in it, or whether it escapes us. Hence, what we call good will is that which conforms with our

[343] For his rejection of research into first causes, which he associated with Condillac's philosophy, see Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 324.
[344] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 356.

> own, and bad will that which resists to it, in the same way as we consider a smell pleasant if we like it or unpleasant if we do not.[345]

In this striking depiction of human psychology, Destutt de Tracy suggested that our ability to recognise other humans as sensitive, willing beings produced the desire to "possess" their wills and to make them conform with our own. Destutt de Tracy also went on to argue that this desire, and the pleasure that it generated, was the "necessary" product of human sensibility and that, although it was of a more developed kind, it operated in the same way as the satisfaction of basic needs, such as eating.[346]

Despite its distinctiveness, this account of human conduct resonated with the moral philosophy of Helvétius. Helvétius, as previously discussed, argued that physical sensibility was the source of all knowledge and the basic inclination it engendered, the desire to experience pleasure and avoid pain, was the single principle behind human behaviour. This principle was the defining feature of individual interest, according to Helvétius, and this interest "governed" all human judgements, passions and desires.[347] Destutt de Tracy put forward a similar account of individual moral psychology, but he reversed the order of the relationship between interest and desire. Helvétius did not differentiate between higher and lower orders of individual cognition, or between needs and desires, and he brought human conduct back to the primary impulses of pleasure and pain. For Destutt de Tracy, individual interest was defined by the nature of human desires, which were themselves the product of the mental capacity to want, not of basic or primary needs. It was desire, he claimed, that lay behind human sociability, and it engendered the "interest" that could be said to follow from the desire to make the will of others conform with our own.[348]

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[345] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 359.
[346] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 360.
[347] Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 46.
[348] This approach could nonetheless be described as following neo-Hobbesian principles of moral psychology, like Helvétius'. Although he disagreed with his political philosophy, Destutt de Tracy was a long-time admirer of Hobbes, and he described him in one place as "the founder of *idéologie* and the reformer of the moral sciences." Destutt de Tracy, *Projet d'élémens d'idéologie*, 17; *Logique*, 116; *Traité de la volonté*, 131-32. This was not lost on one of his readers, the American statesman Thomas Jefferson, who later remarked that Destutt de Tracy "adopts the principle

This idiosyncratic theory of human sociability fed into Destutt de Tracy's conception of morality and society. The desire to make others conform with our will was the foundation for a range of social passions, he argued, as it engendered the desire "for power, riches, glory, honour, and even for the frivolous pleasures associated with vanity." According to Destutt de Tracy, this desire also lay behind the pleasures associated with friendship, love and "sensual and moral sensibility," and it gave birth to what he described as "the great need for society."[349] Although individuals were driven by selfish desires, however, Destutt de Tracy insisted that society was the setting in which human happiness could flourish, insofar as individuals were free to pursue their desires and develop the faculties which allowed them to better satisfy those desires. Individual liberty was therefore the first principle of a just society, he claimed, but it was constrained by the obligation to respect the liberty of others and not to harm them. In a way that recalled Sieyès' political theory, Destutt de Tracy also maintained that the "duties and utility of the social state" consisted in protecting the liberties of individuals, whilst enabling their reciprocal "assistance" with each other.[350]

The principles of Destutt de Tracy's science of ideas thus built on and adapted the earlier philosophies of Helvétius and Sieyès. Destutt de Tracy followed their emphasis on the sensitive origins of human knowledge, as well as on the self-interested motives behind individual conduct. Unlike Helvétius and Sieyès, however, Destutt de Tracy associated human happiness with the satisfaction of desires, rather than of needs. This distinction was important. As I have argued, desire, in his view, was a "complex idea," and it was the product of the operations of the faculty of judgement, while needs were commensurate with basic sensations. Simple needs, following this account, were linked to the primary operations of physical sensibility, prior to all rational

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of Hobbes," and dismissed the idea of an "innate … moral sense." Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 14 October 1816, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement series* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 10:460.

[349] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 360-61, 404.

[350] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 363, 380-81.

thought. Desires, in contrast, were the product of mental choices and evaluations.[351] If this was the case, the sentiments and behaviour that were produced by desires could be altered by modifying those choices and evaluations, that is to say, by modifying individual judgements. The solution to reconciling individual interests in society and hence furthering the collective development of human happiness was therefore essentially cognitive in nature.

The Perfection of Language and Habit

Having detailed the development of the faculties of the individual mind, Destutt de Tracy turned to examine the processes that enabled and constrained the development of human knowledge. Building on Condillac, Destutt de Tracy suggested that the perfection of knowledge did not require an accumulation of facts, but rather a precise and exact understanding of the "laws" that governed the operations of natural phenomena. He also insisted such laws should function as the primary proposition in every respective branch of knowledge. While Condillac maintained that all true knowledge was ultimately identical, Destutt de Tracy argued instead that those propositions should "contain" other truths in such a way that they could be logically deduced from one another on the basis of a single "first and general idea." Taking the example of "social science," he suggested that this branch of knowledge could be brought back to the simple statement that "man is a sensory being." The rights and duties that pertained in political society were all, he claimed, derived from this primary truth. According to Destutt de Tracy, this had yet to be undertaken, however, and social science thus remained in a "nascent" state.[352]

Destutt de Tracy sought to fill out the contents of the science of society, in the last section of *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*, by examining the two processes that shaped what he described as "the present state of human reason" as well as its potential for further "perfection." The first

[351] In one of his later works, he went further and suggested that this distinction could be collapsed and that "our desires are the origins of ours needs," since "every need… is but the need to satisfy a desire." Destutt de Tracy, *Traité de la volonté*, 86-88.
[352] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 380-81, 389-92.

was language, whose development followed the emergence of society, he argued, and whose capacity for perfection was crucial to the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge. The second were mental habits, which Destutt de Tracy linked to the ability to repeat cognitive processes at speed, and which made it possible for individuals to perform intellectual operations at a faster rate. Both language and mental habits had contributed to the development of scientific and rational thought, according to Destutt de Tracy, but they were also the sources of mistakes and errors of judgement. By identifying those mistakes and remedying them, he claimed, it would be possible to perfect human knowledge. Since judgements were the foundation for desires, and these, in turn, were the basis of individual interests, passions and sentiments, the reform of language and mental habits was also key to the perfection of human society.[353]

Destutt de Tracy began his analysis of the present state of human reason by returning to the principles of the science of ideas. As he presented it here, human beings were endowed by "nature" with only two faculties, "sensibility and perfectibility," while everything else was the result of what he called "our industry." It could therefore be said, he suggested, that "our way of being is entirely artificial."[354] Building on Condillac's approach, Destutt de Tracy maintained that humans were born without innate ideas or faculties of mind, and he argued that these were the "artificial" product of human experience. Following Helvétius, he also linked the development of intellectual faculties, and of knowledge more generally, to the capacity for perfectibility. According to Destutt de Tracy, the ability of human beings to develop intellectual faculties was what allowed them to get beyond the mental level of animals, which were not endowed with the same capacity for perfectibility. Citing the cases of two "wild" children said to have been raised in the woods, he argued that humans were nonetheless restricted in their development when left

[353] This approach dovetailed with contemporary understandings of human behaviour, and Destutt de Tracy's ideas would shape discussions over the relationship between ideas, signs and habits during the Directory. On these debates, see Staum, *Minerva's Message*, 102-15; Sophie A. Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 181-226.
[354] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 401.

to their own devices. Human perfectibility was thus contingent on the development of society, he claimed, and in particular on the institution of language.[355]

Destutt de Tracy went on to describe what he took to be the relationship between the historical development of language and of knowledge in a way that closely followed Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines* (1746), but which also evoked the claims in Condorcet's *Esquisse*. Like Condillac, Destutt de Tracy suggested that human language had gradually evolved from rudimentary shouts and gestures to the "language of action," and the language of action had, in turn, led to the more sophisticated forms of expression and communication of "spoken language." Although humans were capable of a degree of perfectibility in the early stages of society, Destutt de Tracy insisted that this capacity was limited until the emergence of spoken language. This was the case, he argued, because this emergence led to the creation of "artificial signs," or tools for representing abstract and general ideas, and it was these that allowed improvements in knowledge to be passed on from generation to generation. Like Condorcet, Destutt de Tracy thus associated human perfectibility with the perfection of language, but he insisted, following Condillac, that intellectual advances were a condition of the precision and accuracy of "signs" and the establishment of a "well-made language."[356]

More so than his predecessors, Destutt de Tracy emphasised that there was nonetheless a tension between the development of language and of knowledge. The rectitude of judgement, he argued, relied on the proximity between individual experience and its representation. Complex and abstract ideas introduced a distance between the two, and this was the source of confusion,

[355] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 401-07. On the interest in so-called "wild" children in the late eighteenth century, see Jean-Luc Chappey, *Sauvagerie et civilisation. Une histoire politique de Victor de l'Aveyron* (Paris: Fayard, 2017).
[356] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 326, 407-29. On the contemporary discussions of the nature and principles of a "well-made language," see Staum, *Minerva's Message*, 102-04.

imperfection and variation in the individual ability to reason.[357] Although these shortcomings were inherent to the development of "signs," according to Destutt de Tracy, they could be mitigated through the reform of language. This was possible, in his view, because there were universal principles of reason and, whatever the gap between experience and representation, individuals "in all ages and in all times" invariably "perceived the same relation in the same way, as long as it is truly the same and it is within their reach."[358] Destutt de Tracy thus put forward a series of proposals to further the clarity, consistency and analytical precision of contemporary idioms. These included making spelling consistent with pronunciation, reforming syntax in line with the "natural development of ideas" and introducing new terms when appropriate. If those proposals were followed through, he declared, "remarkable changes" would ensue in the "development of human reason."[359]

The other process that shaped the acquisition of individual knowledge was mental habits, or what Destutt de Tracy described as the "frequent repetition of the same intellectual operations." A wide range of human behaviour was conventionally associated with the power of habit, he claimed, but the benefits of this particular feature of the faculty of thought were all based on the frequent repetition of individual judgements. This repetition contributed to the greater ease in processing perceptions as well as the ability to develop a wider range of ideas and judgements at greater speed.[360] The benefits of mental habits, according to Destutt de Tracy, had been enhanced by the emergence of "artificial signs," and the more perfected those signs were, the "more powerful" and "more extensive" were the effects of those habits. At the same time,

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[357] It was "universally recognised," he claimed, that "in all forms of knowledge, the more a man derives from his own experience and the less from others, the greater is the precision of his judgement." Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 419.
[358] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 411-14. He would later insisted that "the diversity of our individual dispositions does not contradict the fact that the truth is the same for all and that there exists a general reason and a universal common sense." *Logique*, 323-24.
[359] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 414-18. Destutt de Tracy nonetheless dismissed the potential benefits of a "universal language," a project to which some of his contemporaries aspired. On this issue, see Rosenfeld, *Problem of Signs*, 210-26. For Condorcet's remarks on this subject, see "Sketch," 139, 143.
[360] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 440-41.

however, habits of mind allowed individuals to reason with haste and without proper scrutiny, and this led to faulty judgements and, by extension, irrational behaviour. It was therefore imperative to develop and disseminate proper mental habits in society, or, as Destutt de Tracy put it, "to make good judgements habitual."[361]

In the context of contemporary discussions of how to stabilise and pacify social relations after the Terror, Destutt de Tracy underlined the association of habit with the faculty of judgement, and he highlighted its role in shaping individual conduct.[362] Despite the sometimes problematic effects of the power of habit, he insisted that this feature of human thought was, like language, capable of rectification. He did not outline the ways in which this could be achieved in *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*, but he did highlight the significance of this task. Making good judgements habitual was, he claimed, what "the whole of education consisted in, both for adults and for children." For Destutt de Tracy, the power of mental habits was also behind "nearly all the difficulties of the science called *idéologie*." This power could nonetheless be harnessed, he believed, to foster virtuous conduct in an enlightened polity.[363] This would be the central focus of Destutt de Tracy's reflections on the development of public morality in the late 1790s, and it would shape the particular principles of his model of human improvement – the need to distinguish between the mental capacities of the masses and those of the governing elite.

Enlightened Government and the Cultivation of Judgement

Human perfectibility, according to Destutt de Tracy, was chiefly a cognitive process and it was associated with the development of individual faculties of mind. The perfection of knowledge, meanwhile, was a condition of the precision and accuracy of intellectual conceptions, and it was shaped by two processes in particular: language and mental habits. Those two processes

[361] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 442-43, 448.
[362] On these discussions, see Staum, *Minerva's Message*, 110-13.
[363] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 443-44.

nonetheless took individuals away from their experience, in his view, and this contributed to errors and imperfections in human reasoning, as well as to irrational forms of behaviour. The solution to these problems, as Destutt de Tracy presented it in *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*, lay in the reform of language and mental habits. Having outlined proposals for the former, he put forward proposals for the latter in an essay, published in 1798, on the means of furthering public morality in French society. This essay, which Destutt de Tracy later described as the product of "lengthy contemplation," applied the principles of his science of ideas to the moral and intellectual regeneration of the French citizenry, and it would represent his defining contribution to discussions of republican reform and social stabilisation under the Directory.[364]

Published as a response to a prize contest organised by the Institut national, Destutt de Tracy's essay was an intervention into an issue of pressing concern for republican reformers in the late 1790s.[365] Although Robespierre's infamous "Cult of the Supreme Being" had been repudiated by Thermidorian republicans, revolutionaries and public authorities remained concerned with finding a replacement for Christianity to further the moral cohesion of French society, which had been threatened and undermined during the Terror. The most ambitious attempt to provide such a replacement was the civic cult of *théophilanthropie*, promoted by Louis-Marie de La Révellière-Lépeaux, a member of the executive government of the Directory, which sought to reconcile republican morality and traditional modes of spiritual devotion.[366] In contradistinction with La Révellière-Lépeaux, Destutt de Tracy insisted that the best way of promoting public morality was through the administration of laws and, specifically, through the consistent punishment of crimes, as this was the only sure way of altering human behaviour and furthering

[364] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple* (Paris, an VI [1798]); *De l'amour* [1813], ed. Claude Jolly (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 75.
[365] On the contest, see Staum, *Minerva's Message*, 68-70; Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror*, 96-100.
[366] Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution*, 206-08; Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror*, 84-96.

virtuous conduct in society. Destutt de Tracy developed this argument by elaborating the principles of his moral philosophy.

Building on the ideas in his *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*, Destutt de Tracy argued in his essay that human conduct was essentially driven by selfish desires. At a time of neo-Jacobin revival, Destutt de Tracy rejected the claim, put forward by other respondents to the prize contest, that private property was the origin of moral evil, and that public morality required the establishment of an "absolute community of goods." This position contravened the basic notions of property that derived from a sense of self, according to Destutt de Tracy, since the ideas "of *thine* and *mine* inevitably derived from [the distinction between] *you* and *me*." For a community of goods to be feasible, he argued, humans would have to be endowed with a natural capacity for moral sympathy or compassion, and "a man would have to feel the pleasure and pain in the organs of another as if they were his own." Only on this basis, he claimed, would it be possible for men to "truly love their fellow beings as they do themselves." Rejecting this supposition, Destutt de Tracy insisted that such "a degree of perfection" was "impossible for us to attain."[367]

Thus opposing the idea that humans had a natural capacity for moral sympathy, as Condorcet had earlier suggested, Destutt de Tracy maintained that individuals had distinct interests by virtue of their sensitive nature. These interests inevitably came into conflict, he claimed, because humans could not live in isolation from one another, as Rousseau had supposed, and they were compelled to seek each other's assistance.[368] The solution to mitigating this conflict, according to Destutt de Tracy, was through the establishment of "common rules" that reduced the frequency of the occasions that men had "to harm one another" and, in particular, through the establishment of laws that punished crimes. It also required the creation of a system of

[367] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 10-12. On neo-Jacobinism under the Directory, see Michael Sonenscher, "Property, Community and Citizenship," in *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, 465-94.
[368] For the reference to Rousseau, see Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 11.

government and public administration capable of applying those laws consistently, without contradiction and without introducing new forms of conflict between individuals. Although he argued that the "social art" could not entirely eliminate the sources of harm, Destutt de Tracy maintained that such repressive and punitive laws could lessen their effects and prevent individual citizens from becoming "either oppressors or oppressed." Good laws, he therefore argued, were "the true supports of morality."[369]

This approach, as before, resonated with the philosophy of Helvétius. As discussed in chapter one, Helvétius argued that the rational reform of laws was crucial to encouraging virtuous conduct. This was the case, in his view, because human behaviour was determined by the inclination to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Destutt de Tracy articulated a similar position, but he linked his approach more directly to the principles of his *idéologie*. Building on his *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*, Destutt de Tracy argued in his response to the prize contest that the science of morality consisted in "the knowledge of the effects of our inclinations and our sentiments on our happiness," and it involved "the application of the science of the generation of those sentiments and of the ideas from which they derived."[370] It was "well established," he also claimed in this essay, that the actions of the will were the product of choices and evaluations and that redirecting conduct required changing individual judgements. Altering "the inclinations of men," he announced, thus ultimately amounted to "indoctrinating them in good and evil."[371] The development of moral conduct in society did not, in other words, simply involve aligning virtue with pleasure, as Helvétius had proposed, it also consisted in making good judgements habitual.

Destutt de Tracy set out a series of proposals to further the regeneration of the French citizenry on this basis. These proposals brought out the underlying distinction Destutt de Tracy supposed between the mental capacities of the masses and those of the governing elite. Although the first

[369] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 12-15.
[370] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 19.
[371] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 16.

notions of moral science were easily understood by all, its more developed principles were not in everyone's reach, he argued, and only those involved in government and public administration needed to possess a complete and exhaustive knowledge of the science of morality. According to Destutt de Tracy, most men did not have "the time or the will to follow a long course of instruction," and even fewer of them were "capable of understanding and retaining a vast system of well-connected ideas." Didactic moral instruction also had limited effects, he claimed, and it was only the knowledge that individuals deduced from their own experience that consistently and reliably shaped their conduct. It was therefore necessary, in his view, to establish two streams of moral and intellectual regeneration: one for the citizenry in general and another for "legislators and governors."[372]

To begin with, Destutt de Tracy proposed the implementation of a vast programme of reforms, whose purpose was to redirect individual inclinations to moral ends. The first and most important part of this programme was what he described as "the complete, speedy and inevitable execution of punitive laws [*l'exécution complète, rapide et inévitable des lois répressives*]". This, he claimed, would remove any of the perceived benefits of criminal behaviour and it would serve to quash, as he put it, "the seed of vicious inclinations." The second part of this programme was the competent administration of public finances and the elimination of public debt.[373] The third consisted in the reform of laws and administration in line with the "natural rights of man." This involved what Destutt de Tracy called "the proclamation of equality," which included the abolition of all privilege and hereditary power, the exclusion of priests from holding public office and the uniformity of laws and customs. The implementation of natural rights also encompassed the institution of the right to divorce, the equal division of inheritance and, finally, both "full and

[372] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 18-22.
[373] The issue of public debt, which was at the root cause of the French Revolution itself, remained a source of anxiety for reformers under the Directory, as political authorities struggled to address the underlying financial constraints on public expenditure and a persistent large deficit was associated with a series of intractable moral and political ills. On the background and context for those anxieties, see Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*.

absolute freedom to practice any form of industry" and the freedom of trade, both foreign and domestic.[374]

This ambitious programme of reforms extended the projects earlier advanced by Sieyès and Condorcet, and it was based on similar principles of right, public morality and political economy. In the heightened state of tension and turmoil that characterised social relations after the Terror, Destutt de Tracy nonetheless gave greater significance to the administration of criminal justice in the moral regeneration of the French polity. In contrast to Sieyès and Condorcet, Destutt de Tracy also made no mention of the participation, either direct or indirect, of the citizenry in public affairs. This circumspection arguably reflected a more "technocratic" approach to government, as scholars have suggested.[375] This approach did not, however, drive a wedge between social science and individual rights, as is sometimes claimed.[376] Rather, Destutt de Tracy adapted the earlier political philosophies of Sieyès and Condorcet, and he dispensed, not with a commitment to the implementation of natural rights in society in general, but specifically with the right of political participation of citizens. As was brought out by his remarks on the reform of public education, Destutt de Tracy thus articulated an ideal of government that continued but revised the views of his revolutionary predecessors.

Having set out his programme of legal and economic reforms, Destutt de Tracy moved on to discuss the role that public schools and festivals could play in furthering moral conduct. He turned to this subject with what he said was "some embarrassment," as those institutions had, he claimed, only a "weak and limited utility." In marked contrast to Condorcet, who had stressed the importance of the diffusion of knowledge and the cultivation of moral sentiments, Destutt

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[374] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 22, 25-27.
[375] Martin S. Staum, "Individual Rights and Social Control: Political Science in the French Institute," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 3 (1987): 420; Thomas E. Kaiser, "Enlightenment and Public Education during the French Revolution: The Views of the Idéologues," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 10 (1980): 103.
[376] For this view, see Welch, "Social Science from the French Revolution to Positivism," 173; and, more generally, Welch, *Liberty and Utility*.

de Tracy insisted that in times of social and political turmoil, the priority for public authorities should not be establishing festivals or creating a vast system of public instruction. He argued that only "a few schools" were required to educate those who were to occupy political and administrative functions, along with "a few others to perfect scientific theories and to train schoolteachers." For Destutt de Tracy, most children could receive their education from their parents, and the key to this education was instilling virtuous habits in adults, as well as easing the financial burdens on them. "The smallest reduction in taxes," he therefore declared, would do more to increase literacy than "a legion of school-masters."[377]

In this way, Destutt de Tracy set out two pathways of moral and intellectual regeneration for the French citizenry in the late 1790s, based on the divergent capacities of two classes in society.[378] This approach pointed to the original features of Destutt de Tracy's conception of human perfectibility. Although he considered that there were universal principles of reason, and that there was a uniform relationship between judgement and conduct, prevailing social distinctions called for two different methods of cognitive improvement in society. For those with the time, will and inclination, this involved the acquisition of the higher-order principles of scientific knowledge and morality; for those without, it consisted in the alteration, or "indoctrination," of mental habits through submission to the legal and administrative powers of the state. Although this approach was redolent of the elitist aspects of Condorcet's political philosophy, as well as of the Physiocrats' vision of reform, Destutt de Tracy promoted neither a republic of reason nor a

[377] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 28-33. These views aligned with the emphasis republican theorists put, in the aftermath of the Terror, on the moral importance of the patriarchal family. Lynn Hunt, "Rehabilitating the Family," chap. 6 in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Suzanne Desan, "Reconstituting the Social after the Terror – The Backlash against Family Innovations," chap. 7 in *The Family on Trial in the French Revolution*. On his broader involvement with the reform of public education in his time, see Claude Jolly, "Destutt de Tracy éducateur," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, *Premiers écrits (1789-1794), Sur l'éducation et l'instruction publique (1798-1805)*, ed. Claude Jolly (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 113-21.

[378] In a later work, Destutt de Tracy would suggest that "every civilised society" was necessarily divided into "two classes of men," the class that derived its substance from manual labour, and the other that derived its revenue from property or intellectual work, and that these required different streams of public education. *Observations sur le système actuel d'instruction publique* (Paris, an IX [1801]), 2-3.

"legal despotism." He looked instead to the ideal of a government led by a political and scientific elite, trained in the precepts of his *idéologie*.

This model of human improvement reflected the particular social and political conditions in France under the Directory. As Destutt de Tracy insisted in his essay on public morality, a more felicitous and less agitated society would likely establish a greater number of schools and festivals, as more people would be in a position to finance those institutions and to benefit from them.[379] Destutt de Tracy's assessment of the limited use of such institutions in the late 1790s was thus not only the product of a gloomy conception of human nature. It also spoke to his evaluation of the proper sequencing of social and political reform. The priority, for Destutt de Tracy, was the stabilisation of social relations through the dissemination of virtuous conduct and rational government. The condition for social pacification and republican reform after the Terror was not the diffusion of knowledge in society or mass public education, in his view, but the cultivation of good judgement through the reform of language, an effective system of law and punishment and the perfection of the mental habits of individual citizens. This "idealist" approach nonetheless contrasted with the model of human improvement of the other leading theoretician of the Idéologues, Pierre Cabanis.

From Divergence to Convergence

As mentioned, Cabanis developed his own scientific project in a set of lectures, also at the Institut national, in the late 1790s. These included three initial lectures in which Cabanis set out the theoretical principles of his science of man, followed by three further lectures in which he explored the application of this science to different aspects of human experience (age, sex and temperament).[380] The ideas Cabanis developed in these lectures were based on the view that

[379] Destutt de Tracy, *Quels sont les moyens de fonder la morale d'un peuple*, 29.
[380] These would form the basis of what would become Cabanis' best-known work, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, first published in 1802. The first three lectures first appeared in 1798 in the same volume as Destutt de

there was a close connection between mind and body, in contrast to Destutt de Tracy's approach. Building on eighteenth-century medical and physiological thought, Cabanis argued that ascertaining the nature of this connection, as well as the range of factors that shaped it, was crucial to identifying the prospects for individual improvement. Unlike Destutt de Tracy, he also maintained that individuals were endowed with a natural capacity for moral sympathy, and that this capacity underpinned the acquisition of both language and knowledge. Republican reformers could harness this capacity, he believed, to further social peace and harmony under the Directory.

Cabanis' approach was the product of his own, parallel reworking of the philosophies of Condillac and Helvétius as well as of earlier attempts to construct a science of society. Like Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis rejected Condillac's metaphysical dualism and sought to develop an account of individual faculties that derived solely from the operations of physical sensibility. Unlike his Institut national colleague, however, he drew on a vitalist conception of human nature, similar to that earlier articulated by d'Holbach, and he stressed the inherent divergence of human capacities as well as the natural constraints on individual improvement. Cabanis nonetheless emphasised that social institutions could alter the physical, moral and intellectual habits of individuals to a certain extent, and thus further the convergence of human capacities. Drawing on Sieyès' conceptual vocabulary, he described this process as paving the way for an equality of "means." Despite his pronounced, and well-known, emphasis on the inequality of the sexes, Cabanis developed a model of human improvement that built on Condorcet's conception of perfectibility and looked to strengthen the implementation of individual rights in society. I outline this model below through a close analysis of his Institut national lectures, before turning to examine Cabanis' distinct conception of *idéologie*.

Tracy's *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*. Cabanis interrupted his lectures at the Institut national after he was elected to the lower legislative chamber, the *Conseil des Cinq-cents*.

Perfectibility and the Science of Man

Cabanis developed the principles behind his model of improvement in his first three lectures at the Institut national between January and August 1796. These lectures outlined the theoretical foundations of his science of man, and they set out the three components of his vitalist conception of perfectibility: the interdependence between mind and body, the natural diversity of individual faculties and abilities and the close connection between the capacity for knowledge and morality. Cabanis argued in those lectures that, although certain human traits were naturally determined, others were not, and they could therefore be altered. The purpose of the science of man, as he presented it, was to identify and distinguish between those traits and outline the ways in which individual faculties and abilities might be improved. Like Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis developed this approach with a view to improving contemporary understandings of morality and politics as well as to support contemporary efforts at republican reform and social stabilisation. While Destutt de Tracy pursued this project through an analysis of the individual faculties of mind, Cabanis emphasised the need to elaborate a proper understanding of the relationship between the "physical" and the "moral."

Physical sensibility, according to Cabanis, was the first faculty of human nature, and its operations lay behind the generation of individual faculties of mind. In a similar way to Destutt de Tracy, he rejected the need to presuppose the existence of a spiritual soul, and he suggested that humans acquired a sense of self, as well as knowledge more generally, through their ability to compare between different sensations.[381] In contrast to Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis conceived of sensibility as a physiological phenomenon, and not simply as a cognitive process. Sensibility operated like a fluid in individual organisms, he claimed, and this fluid was concentrated in different amounts in different parts of the body. Cabanis also emphasised that sensibility was not

[381] Cabanis, "Considérations générales sur l'étude de l'homme," 41-44, 64-65. See also, Cabanis, "Histoire physiologique des sensations," 104-10.

only activated by external stimuli, as Destutt de Tracy believed, but that there was an internal form of sensibility, set in motion by movements and processes within the body itself.[382] Both internal and external sensibility played a part in shaping individual faculties and dispositions, according to Cabanis, and there was a constant and continuous interrelationship between mind and body.

Cabanis proposed, on this basis, that there were two sides to human perfectibility. The first was "physical education," and it involved improving individual physical health and vigour through "regimen," or the reform of habits relating to diet, exercise, sleep and work. The other consisted in moral and intellectual improvement and encompassed "all the means that shape the minds and characters of men." For Cabanis, the first was also key to the second. This was the case, in his view, because physical education fortified the body, and it allowed "the organs a greater capacity to execute the movements commanded by our needs." Those benefits made it possible, he claimed, for individual faculties of mind to become "more powerful and more extensive," for sensibility to become "more balanced," ideas, "more accurate," and passions, "more elevated."[383] As he set it out in another work, composed shortly after the Terror, there were two "springs" to human perfectibility, but the perfectibility of the "physical" prepared or furnished the instruments for the perfectibility of the "moral," and it was there that those instruments were "put to use" and "given life."[384]

The second feature of Cabanis' conception of perfectibility was the product of his understanding of human variation. In line with eighteenth-century vitalist physiology, Cabanis maintained that the character and intensity of sensitive impressions varied both for the same person at different

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[382] On these two forms of sensibility, see Cabanis, "Suite de l'histoire physiologique des sensations," *Mémoires de l'Institut national*, 1:156-89; Saad, *Cabanis*, 39-74.
[383] Cabanis, "Considérations générales sur l'étude de l'homme," 91-93. Cabanis outlined the nature and characteristics of "regimen" at more length in *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, 2 vols. (Paris, an X [1802]), 2:79-234.
[384] Cabanis, *Coup d'œil sur les révolutions et sur la réforme de la médecine* (Paris, an XII [1804]), 26. On details of when the work was composed, see *Coup d'œil sur la réforme de la médecine*, v.

times, as well as between different people. This variability contributed to different "dispositions of mind and soul," he argued, and it meant that it was impossible to assign an invariable relationship, "common to humankind," between specific impressions, ideas and forms of conduct.[385] According to Cabanis, the variability of human sensibility implied that individuals did not possess the same capacities of mind at birth, as Helvétius had suggested. It also signified that there was not a uniform relationship between human thought and behaviour, as Destutt de Tracy supposed, and that the diversity of individual interests and desires was not simply the product of the diversity of individual judgements. Following the approach earlier charted by d'Holbach, Cabanis emphasised the natural divergence of human physiology and, by extension, the natural inequality of individual faculties, abilities and talents.

Despite natural human inequality, however, Cabanis believed that the science of man could identify the different factors that shaped human sensibility and outline ways of mitigating the divergence of individual capacities. Some of the attributes of individual experience, such as age or sex, were "exclusively the product of nature," he claimed, and therefore impervious to human intervention. Others, however, such as temperament, health or habits, were more strongly shaped by environmental factors, and they could therefore be altered in particular ways. For Cabanis, it was from this perspective that the "study of physical man [was] especially interesting." The possibility of altering individual faculties and abilities should be of primary interest to philosophers, moral theorists and legislators, he also claimed, as it was here that they would find "new insights into human nature" as well as "fundamental views on its [capacity for] perfection."[386] Contemporary reformers should pay close attention to the study of "physical man," according to Cabanis, because this study would show which aspects of individual life

[385] Cabanis, "Considérations générales sur l'étude de l'homme," 65-66.
[386] Cabanis, "Considérations générales sur l'étude de l'homme," 66-67.

could be improved and which could not. The science of man, in other words, could provide the principles for, if not the roadmap to, the moral and intellectual regeneration of French society.

The final component of Cabanis' conception of perfectibility was connected to his account of human morality. In contrast once again to Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis argued that humans possessed a natural capacity for other-regarding moral sentiments, which he described as the product of the faculty of "sympathy." Building on the ideas of Condorcet and Sophie de Grouchy, Cabanis suggested that this faculty reflected the operations of physical sensibility and that it was defined by the ability to "empathise" with the pains and pleasures of other living beings. The faculty of sympathy was also the origin of the development of knowledge, according to Cabanis, as it was the foundation for the faculty of "imitation," which itself enabled the forms of expressive communication that underlay the emergence of language. The faculty of sympathy was therefore the linchpin of Cabanis' model of human improvement: it was not just "one of the greatest springs for sociability," it was also the faculty on which "all of human perfectibility rested."[387] As he described it elsewhere, the moral and sociable inclinations that facilitated the acquisition of language and knowledge were thus "the natural causes of [man's] indefinite perfectibility."[388]

This approach followed contemporary interest in France in extending and adapting the moral philosophy of Adam Smith. As Mariana Saad has shown, Cabanis derived the notion of sympathy from Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), but he also specifically built on the ideas of Sophie de Grouchy.[389] As discussed in the previous chapter, Smith described sympathy as a product of the imagination, while Sophie de Grouchy suggested that it could be brought back to

[387] "Cabanis, "Considérations générales sur l'étude de l'homme," 89-90; "Histoire physiologique des sensations," 131-32.
[388] Cabanis, "Discours de clôture pour le cours sur Hippocrate," [1798] in *Œuvres complètes de Cabanis*, ed. François Thurot (Paris, 1825), 5:135. For his more extended treatment of sympathy, which he generalised into a universal principle of nature, see Cabanis, *Rapport* (1802), 2:469-504.
[389] Mariana Saad, "Sentiment, Sensation and Sensibility: Adam Smith, Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis and Wilhelm von Humboldt," *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 2 (2015): 205-20.

the operations of physical sensibility, a view that shaped Condorcet's earlier conception of human morality. De Grouchy developed this approach in a series of letters, likely addressed to Cabanis, which were attached to her translation of Smith's work that appeared in 1798.[390] Although Cabanis followed de Grouchy in linking sympathy to physical sensibility, he also went further by suggesting that this faculty was the basis for the imitative capacities that lay behind the development of both language and knowledge. Cabanis' approach, in this way, combined in a new and original way Condillac's philosophy of mind and de Grouchy's theory of moral sentiments.

This conception of human perfectibility differed from Destutt de Tracy's. For the proponent of rational *idéologie*, human improvement was chiefly associated with the perfection of the faculties of mind. Because individuals were driven by selfish desires, but their conduct was determined by their choices and evaluations, moral and intellectual regeneration, in his view, primarily involved the cultivation of good judgement. The way in which this was to be carried out, for Destutt de Tracy, would also further the divergence of capacities in society. For Cabanis, perfectibility had both a physical and moral component and, while certain individual traits were naturally fixed, others could be altered and improved. In addition to this, Cabanis maintained that, although humans were naturally divergent in their faculties and abilities, they had a common capacity for moral conduct. The potential for moral and intellectual regeneration, according to Cabanis, would therefore involve a set of reforms that went beyond the cultivation of good judgement. Those reforms, in his eyes, should harness the interconnected human potential for physical, moral and intellectual improvement to lessen the adverse effects of natural and social

[390] Revising Smith's approach, de Grouchy sought to go "further" than him and show "how sympathy must belong to every sensitive being capable of reflection." By emphasising its physical origins, she also wanted to highlight the natural foundations of moral sentiments and that humans experienced "natural pleasure in doing good." Sophie de Grouchy, "Lettres sur la sympathie," 357, 369, 434.

inequalities. The first element of this project would be a concerted programme of hygienic reform.

Hygienic Reform and the "Equality of Means"

Having outlined the theoretical underpinnings of his approach in his first three lectures, Cabanis turned to discuss some of the attributes that shaped individual faculties and abilities in the second set of lectures he presented at the Institut national between September 1796 and October 1797. The first two focused on age and sex. As previously mentioned, Cabanis conceived of these as largely unalterable traits, and hence incapable of alteration. Although medical science could extend human life, as Condorcet had observed at the end of the *Esquisse*, Cabanis insisted that ageing followed a set of pre-determined phases that could not be reversed.[391] In relation to sex, he argued that male and female sensibility operated in different ways and that this produced "essential differences" between men and women. In contradistinction with the earlier views of Helvétius and Condorcet, Cabanis maintained that those differences explained and justified the unequal roles of men and women in society. Men's dispositions made it possible for them to take part in physical and vigorous activities, he claimed, while women's more sensitive constitutions made them more adapted to delicate, sedentary work. Cabanis claimed that women were therefore naturally predisposed to live domestic lives and not suited to public and political affairs.[392]

In his third and final lecture, Cabanis then addressed the subject of human temperaments. In contrast to age and sex, he argued that temperaments could be altered in ways that could improve individual faculties and abilities. This was the case, he claimed, because temperaments were shaped by both internal and external factors. Following the neo-Hippocratic approach of

[391] Cabanis, "De l'influence des âges sur les idées et les affections morales," *Mémoires de l'Institut national des sciences et des arts. Sciences morales et politiques*, vol. 2 (Paris, Fructidor an VII [1799]), 121-29.
[392] Cabanis, "De l'influence des sexes sur le caractère des idées et des affections morales," *Mémoires de l'Institut national*, 2:192-93, 199.

vitalist physicians associated with the Montpellier school, Cabanis insisted that temperaments were fashioned by the actions of humoral fluids, as well as by the relative predominance of cerebral and muscular faculties in individuals.[393] They were also influenced by physical habits or "regimen," which included "non-natural" influences such as diet, exercise, sleep and work, and it was therefore possible to modify temperaments by altering these habits.[394] In the concluding remarks of his lecture, Cabanis proposed that a properly combined and consistently followed "life plan" (*plan de vie*) could, for this reason, effect considerable changes to a person's faculties and abilities and "improve the particular nature of every individual." If instituted on a large scale, reforms that followed precepts of "hygiene" (*l'hygiène*) could also serve "to perfect human nature in general," he announced, and contribute to the gradual and unceasing perfectibility of the human species, from generation to generation.[395]

This approach to human improvement built on the long-standing tradition of social medicine that had developed in France over the course of the eighteenth century.[396] Following the vitalist principles of the Montpellier school in particular, a range of physicians had developed plans for physical and moral improvement and sought to alter the habits that shaped individual faculties, temperaments and abilities. After Rousseau, a number of them also employed the concept of perfectibility and they put forward projects that were intended to rectify the ills associated with modern society.[397] Cabanis was inspired by this tradition of social medicine, but he connected it in a distinctive way to a republican conception of social regeneration. In tune with his conception of human perfectibility, he suggested that hygienic reform could mitigate natural differences of ability and further the convergence of individual capacities in a way that would

[393] Cabanis, "De l'influence des tempéramens sur la formation des idées et des affections morales," *Mémoires de l'Institut national*, 2:230-79.
[394] Cabanis, "De l'influence des tempéramens," 281.
[395] Cabanis, "De l'influence des tempéramens," 283-84.
[396] On this tradition and the broader set of social and moral concerns behind it, see Sean M. Quinlan, *The Great Nation in Decline: Sex, Modernity and Health Crises in Revolutionary France, c. 1750–1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
[397] Lotterie, *Progrès et perfectibilité*, 51-55.

support the equal participation of male citizens in public life.[398] Although he did not provide a detailed account of what this programme would entail, he outlined its main tenets in the peroration of his lecture.

Alluding to the breeding techniques employed for animals and plants, Cabanis called on contemporary reformers to perfect the "human race" with the aim of producing "wise and good citizens." Citing the "vivid faculty of sympathy," Cabanis presented the physical improvement of humanity as a project of universal interest, and he argued that, "in an era of regeneration," it was high time "to dare to realise in ourselves what we have so happily achieved in several of our living companions," and to "revise and correct the work of nature."[399] Hygienic reform, he also claimed, could perfect people's physical abilities in a way that paralleled the moral transformation effected by the system of equal rights, so that:

> … one could, in time, produce for collections of men taken together a sort of equality of means [*une espèce d'égalité de moyens*] that does not exist in their primitive organisation, and which, similar to the equality of rights, would be a product of enlightenment and perfected reason.[400]

As Cabanis presented it, an enlightened programme of hygienic reform could alter individual abilities in ways that would "equalise" capacities in society. This equality, he went on to explain, did not mean that individuals would possess exactly the same degree of strength, or the same dispositions of mind and will. A "long physical and moral education" (*une longue culture physique et morale*) would not mould citizens into a "uniform and common type," Cabanis insisted, and there would still be "notable differences" in their temperaments, abilities and talents. They would, he nonetheless claimed, be "equally capable of social life."[401]

Without going into more details, Cabanis promoted the idea of a project of physical improvement that would further the convergence of individual capacities and support the equal

[398] On the significance of this project, see also Saad, *Cabanis*, 271-79.
[399] Cabanis, "De l'influence des tempéramens," 284.
[400] Cabanis, "De l'influence des tempéramens," 285.
[401] Cabanis, "De l'influence des tempéramens," 285-86.

participation of male citizens in public life. Although his approach evokes the sinister practices of later eugenicists, he presented this project as the public health equivalent to the system of equal rights.[402] Cabanis insisted that there were limitations to human perfectibility, because certain traits, notably age and sex, were pre-determined and unalterable. Despite those limitations, however, he argued that individual "life plans," or personalised programmes of physical betterment, could alter habits and inclinations in ways that would mitigate the differences of ability between citizens. This approach extended Condorcet's conception of perfectibility to the physical realm. Tellingly, however, Cabanis nonetheless did not mention the greater participation of citizens in politics, and he excluded women from the public sphere altogether. Like Destutt de Tracy, but in a very different way, Cabanis thus developed a model of human improvement attuned to the concerns and anxieties of republican reformers after the Terror.

Cabanis contra Andrieux

Cabanis interrupted his series of lectures at the Institut national in 1798 following his election to the lower legislative chamber, the *Conseil des cinq-cents*. Over the following years at the Assembly, he would build on the ideas of his Institut national lectures and put forward proposals for the reform of public education and other areas of public administration.[403] In the late 1790s, Cabanis also came to the defence of the group of reformers associated with Destutt de Tracy's science of ideas in a short article published in *La Décade philosophique*, a weekly periodical associated with the Idéologues during the Directory.[404] He did so in response to an accusation, earlier levelled by the playwright François Andrieux in the same journal, that contemporary advocates of the concept

[402] On the links with later eugenicist practices, see Daniel Teysseire, "Eugénisme et euthanasie chez Cabanis," in *Actes du huitième congrès international des Lumières*, (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1992), 272-75.
[403] Some of these can be found in *Œuvres philosophiques de Cabanis*, eds. Claude Lehec and Jean Cazeneuve, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956), 2:388-450.
[404] Joanna Kitchin, *Un journal "philosophique": La Décade (1794-1807)* (Paris: Minard, 1965); *La Décade philosophique comme système*, eds. Josiane Boulad-Ayoub and Martin Nadeau, 9 vols. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003).

of perfectibility were solely concerned with the perfection of the human mind and that their science of ideas was ill-suited to fostering moral cohesion and patriotic devotion. Cabanis contested these claims and argued that the proponents of perfectibility and *idéologie* supported not simply the diffusion of knowledge in society, but also the regeneration of moral passions and sentiments. His response to Andrieux would thus illuminate the differences between his conception of *idéologie* and that of Destutt de Tracy.

Andrieux's initial accusations were made in the context of a report of parliamentary affairs in March 1799. Having informed his readers of the recent French declaration of war on Austria and Tuscany, Andrieux took this opportunity to highlight the need to establish institutions to galvanise public support for war. Citing the example of the Ancients, Andrieux argued that public ceremonies and other gatherings could provide a way of stirring popular "senses and imagination," and thus of creating a "public spirit." Contemporary legislators had neglected such institutions, he argued, because they were imbued with a false conception of human nature, and they were obsessed with cold "analysis" and "dissertation." He also maintained that so-called "doctors of the school of the perfectibility of the human mind" failed to see that the majority of citizens were not metaphysicians and were "no worse for it."[405] Without explicitly mentioning them, Andrieux rejected the approaches of Destutt de Tracy and other like-minded reformers associated with his science of ideas. Picking up the arguments of a long-running debate between French revolutionaries, he did so to promote the revival of the sentiments of patriotism and devotion associated with Ancient republican virtue.[406]

Cabanis responded to Andrieux by contesting his characterisation of the so-called "doctors" of human perfectibility. As he presented it, in an article published one month later, those theorists

[405] [François Andrieux], "Affaires de l'intérieur. Résolution du Conseil des Cinq-Cents…," *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique* 18 (30 ventôse an VII [20 March 1799]): 575-76.
[406] On this debate, see, among others, Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, transl. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

were concerned with disseminating rational habits in society, and those habits were the only sure way of placing "liberty, peace and happiness" on solid foundations. Cabanis also maintained that, if a range of modern philosophers regarded human perfectibility as "indefinite," a belief in the human capacity for improvement had underpinned the efforts of philosophers and legislators "in all times."[407] Further to this, he argued that Andrieux had misrepresented the philosophy of the proponents of *idéologie*. In contrast to the abstract and unintelligible debates of traditional metaphysics, he claimed, the contemporary followers of Locke, Condillac and Helvétius focused on the simpler task of establishing "an understanding of the processes of the human mind" and determining "the rules man must follow in the pursuit of truth." This approach was the only "true" metaphysics, according to Cabanis, and its principles applied to a range of different pursuits: they not only taught philosophers "the general art of observation or experimentation," they also showed the "common artisan" the rules and procedures necessary to carry out their work.[408]

In this way, Cabanis sought to defend the Idéologues by promoting the timelessness of the ideal of human perfectibility, along with the applicability of their science of ideas. This account was at odds with the approach of Destutt de Tracy, the original architect of *idéologie*. As he had presented it in *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser*, the science of ideas was concerned with the origins and development of the faculties of the mind. Although it had wide applications, this science required specialised knowledge, in his view, and it was chiefly those involved in government and public administration, or in science and teaching, who had the time and ability to learn and apply its precepts. Cabanis, by contrast, argued that the principles of this science underpinned both

[407] Cabanis, "Lettre sur un passage de la "Décade philosophique" et en général sur la perfectibilité de l'esprit humain," *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique* 21 (30 germinal an VII [19 April 1799]): 149-51.
[408] "Si elle enseigne au philosophe l'art général d'observer ou d'expérimenter, elle démontre à chaque ouvrier, en quoi consiste l'art particulier qu'il professe, pourquoi les matériaux sur lesquels il s'exerce, et l'objet qu'il se propose étant une fois reconnus, les organes de l'homme, ou les autres instruments de l'art doivent être mis en usage d'après certaines règles ou procédés, et les procédés ainsi que les instruments eux-mêmes perfectionnés suivant une certaine direction." Cabanis, "Lettre sur la perfectibilité de l'esprit humain," 151-53.

practical and theoretical pursuits, and its methods could be employed by artisans as well as philosophers. Destutt de Tracy conceived of *idéologie* as a science for the few, while Cabanis presented it as a science for the many. The divergence in their views was further brought out by Cabanis' ensuing remarks.

Having alluded to the practical applications of the science of ideas, Cabanis turned to its relevance to the reform of public education. Recalling Condorcet's earlier claims, Cabanis insisted that ignorance in society perpetuated "misery," "dependence" and relations of "domination," and that it undermined the social stability of republican government. One of the "first duties of the legislator," he claimed, was thus to further the spread of knowledge. Doing so, however, required the lights of the science of ideas, as this science supplied the methods behind the art of teaching. This art consisted less in imparting a mass of knowledge, he also argued, than in fostering the habits of mind required for rational and independent evaluation. The cultivation of those habits among the "indigent class" was particularly important, he insisted, as its limited resources meant that its form of education needed to be "simple, neat and easy." Encouraging those habits was also necessary, according to Cabanis, to support the continuous and unceasing emancipation of human knowledge from errors and prejudices.[409] The inculcation of rational habits among the citizenry was thus the condition for stable and peaceful republican government, in his view, as well as for the indefinite perfectibility of the human mind.

Following his discussion of public education, Cabanis addressed the view that the Idéologues did not consider the moral or affective aspects of human experience, as Andrieux had claimed. According to Cabanis, the Idéologues had in fact been "the first to highlight the utility of the institutions" that gave morality and laws "the support of sentiment and imagination." As he went on to explain:

[409] Cabanis, "Lettre sur la perfectibilité de l'esprit humain," 153-55.

> How could a philosophy founded on the knowledge of the faculties of man, and which brings back to sensations, all the system of ideas and moral affections, indeed neglect the powerful spring of enthusiasm, which, one might say, is itself a more sublime and sympathetic type of sensation?[410]

The Idéologues gave primacy to sensitive experience, Cabanis insisted, and they were therefore bound to pay attention to both the intellectual and emotional aspects of human experience. *Contra* Andrieux, Cabanis argued that they had not overlooked the "powerful spring of enthusiasm," an emotion associated at the time with religious devotion and political excess, and they recognised the importance of institutions which "spoke to the heart."[411] Cabanis did not go on to detail what those institutions were, or how they might activate human passions and sentiments in ways that supported, rather than undermined, moral cohesion. His belief, unspoken in this piece, in the natural human capacity for moral conduct nonetheless supported the idea that the citizenry could safely express enthusiasm, without threatening the social foundations of republican government.

Cabanis made no allusion to any differences in the moral or intellectual principles of the Idéologues in his article. In the face of criticism, he presented a united front. His account of the social applications of the science of ideas nonetheless underlined the divergence between his approach and that of Destutt de Tracy. In his interventions during the Directory, Destutt de Tracy emphasised the dissemination of rational habits in society through the cultivation of good judgement. Because there were limitations to the capacities of the masses, and they did not possess a natural capacity for moral conduct, he viewed this process as involving two, divergent paths. One of these, for the political and scientific elite, involved education in public schools, where students would be taught the advanced precepts of *idéologie* and moral science. The other, for the social masses, consisted in the reform of conduct through the system of laws. Destutt de

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[410] Cabanis, "Lettre sur la perfectibilité de l'esprit humain," 157.
[411] On contemporary conceptions of "enthusiasm," see Bronislaw Baczko, "Démocratie rationnelle et enthousiasme révolutionnaire," in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 108, no. 2 (1996), 583-99; K. Steven Vincent, "Benjamin Constant, the French Revolution, and the Problem of Modern Character," *History of European Ideas* 30, no. 1 (2004): 5-21.

Tracy also emphasised the purely cognitive aspect of human improvement and dismissed the "utility" of public festivals or popular expressions of enthusiasm, which he admitted to "dreading."[412]

For Cabanis, by contrast, the stabilisation and harmonisation of social relations called for the dissemination of rational habits in society through public education, not the application of laws. Rather than "indoctrinate" the citizenry in good and evil, as Destutt de Tracy proposed, Cabanis suggested that the citizenry should be given the tools required for independent evaluation and judgement, that is to say, the tools of *idéologie*. As he described in an earlier article in *La Décade philosophique*, the focus of contemporary reformers should be on diffusing "the new methods" behind the acquisition of knowledge, as these were the only sure way of realising "a sort of equality of minds."[413] In addition to this, Cabanis maintained that the Idéologues were concerned as much with the expression of public passions and sentiments as they were with intellectual improvement. If Destutt de Tracy's emphasis on the need for divergent means of human improvement was shaped by a concern with public order and social control, Cabanis' emphasis on the convergence of individual capacities was the product of an aspiration to emancipate the citizenry from the shackles of ignorance and the domination of an intellectual elite.

The disparity in their approaches was not explicitly recognised by either Cabanis or Destutt de Tracy.[414] They shared broadly similar political philosophies in their time, and, despite their different conceptions of perfectibility and human morality, they both sought to promote enlightened reform after the Terror on the basis of a sensationist theory of knowledge. This approach put them at odds with other reformers under the Directory, such as those, like La Révellière-Lépeaux, who wished to further social harmony by establishing a new civil religion, or

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412 Kennedy, *Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of Ideology*, 162.
413 Cabanis, "Lettre aux auteurs de la "Décade Philosophique" sur l'école polytechnique," *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique* 23, no. 4 (10 brumaire an VIII [31 October 1798]): 203.
414 Cabanis would later suggest that Destutt de Tracy's *Projet d'élémens d'idéologie* was the "only truly complete work" devoted to the science of ideas; *Rapports* (1802), 1:12, n. 1.

those, like Andrieux, who looked for inspiration from ancient models of republican virtue. In the late 1790s, the followers of Condillac, Helvétius and Condorcet had more in common than they differed, and the confluence of their views likely explained the uniform account of their ideas Cabanis put forward in his response to Andrieux. The divergence between his model of human improvement and Destutt de Tracy's nonetheless meant that both Andrieux's critique and Cabanis' ensuing apology were justified: they were arguing over two different versions of *idéologie*.

The Intellectual Legacies of the Idéologues

The coup of 18 Brumaire was a decisive turning point in the history of both the French Revolution and early social science. Despite repeated attempts to stabilise social relations after the Terror, the rifts that continued to divide the French polity, combined with the pressures of external war, undermined the capacity of the Directory to govern effectively and contributed to a renewed desire for constitutional change. Orchestrated by Sieyès, Cabanis and others, the coup led to the introduction of a new system of government, the Consulate, with more powers and more restricted political rights. In its immediate aftermath, Cabanis heaped praised on the new Constitution, which was partially the work of Sieyès, arguing that it was an improvement on the "representative system." This was the case, he insisted, because it was "based on individual rights," but it would allow authorities to govern without the undue influence of the masses, and would thus institute a "democracy purged of all inconveniences." He also claimed that this system was inspired by the precepts of the "social art."[415] In this conception therefore, the Consulate was the end-product of the decades-long search for a science of society.[416]

[415] Cabanis, *Quelques considérations sur l'organisation sociale en général et particulièrement sur la nouvelle Constitution* (Paris, 1799), 4-5, 7, 10-12, 15, 24, 27.
[416] On the contributions of the social science of Sieyès and others in shaping the Constitution of the Consulate, see Margerison, "The Legacy of Social Science"; Jainchill, "Liberal Authoritarianism and the Constitution of the Year VIII." More generally, see Brown, *Ending the French Revolution.*

Although it led the establishment of a more authoritarian form of government, Cabanis defended the coup of 18 Brumaire because he believed that it promised to put an end to the social and political turmoil that had consumed the French polity in the 1790s, yet allow individual liberties to flourish under a strong and stable government.[417] The personal ambitions of the First Consul, Napoléon Bonaparte, made short work of these hopes, however, and his ascendancy would lead to the marginalisation of republican reformers in general, and of the Idéologues in particular.[418] The consolidation of power by Napoléon would notably see the resurgence of conservative and religious public opinion, the suppression of institutions associated with Thermidorian republicanism, such as the Écoles centrales and the class of moral and political sciences at the Institut national, and, eventually, fresh imperial expansion and the formal end of the French republic.[419] Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis were both side-lined as a result. Although they accepted honorary titles under Napoléon, they withdrew from direct involvement in public affairs during his rule and shifted their focus to their intellectual work.

The turn of the nineteenth century was also the moment when a significant section of public opinion turned against the revolutionary discourse of perfectibility. Extending the claims voiced by Andrieux, a range of commentators launched new attacks on the moral and political philosophy of the Idéologues and, more generally, on the republican and scientific ideals of thinkers associated with Condorcet's model of human improvement.[420] As mentioned at the start of chapter one, those attacks were spurred by the publication of Staël's *De la littérature* in 1800, and they led to a public debate that came to be known as the "quarrel on perfectibility." Responding to Staël's work, counter-revolutionary critics, such as Louis de Fontanes, François-

[417] Howard Brown and Andrew Jainchill describe this view of politics as "liberal authoritarianism."
[418] Once in power, Bonaparte notoriously attacked and disparaged the Idéologues, designating them by the epithet by which they are now remembered.
[419] Jean-Luc Chappey, "Les Idéologues face au coup d'état du 18 brumaire an VIII: Des illusions aux désillusions," *Politix* 14, no. 56 (2001), 55-75; Staum, *Minerva's Message*, 211-26; Gusdorf, *La conscience révolutionnaire*, 315-28. More generally, see Malcolm Crook, *Napoléon Comes to Power: Democracy and Dictatorship in Revolutionary France, 1795-1804* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).
[420] For one particularly pointed critique, see Jean-Baptiste Aubry, *Anti-Condillac: ou harangue aux idéologues modernes* (Paris, 1800).

René de Chateaubriand and, later, Joseph Fiévée, disputed the idea of continuous human improvement, citing the example of Classical poetry and literature, and opposed what they regarded as the anti-religious sentiments of the proponents of perfectibility.[421] This critique was influential and, along with lending support to Napoléon's increasing hold on power, it would shape the intellectual legacies of the Idéologues in the nineteenth century.

One strand of thought reconfigured Destutt de Tracy's science of ideas and, following the tide of public opinion, took it in a more spiritualist direction. Adapting his "idealistic" approach, and sometimes combining it with principles derived from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, thinkers such as Joseph Degérando and Maine de Biran appealed to the active powers of the human soul to explain the internal operations of the mind.[422] This line of thought would contribute to the later emergence of the school of "eclecticism," whose principal proponent, Victor Cousin, played a major role in shaping conceptions of the self in nineteenth-century France.[423] Having initially focused on developing his science of ideas, Destutt de Tracy himself turned his attention away from *idéologie* under Napoléon and became more interested in questions of political economy. In a series of works published under the Restoration, he thus came to emphasise the harmonising virtues of modern commerce and the division of labour.[424] This approach picked up the ideas of Sieyès and of the Swiss political economist Jean-Baptiste Say, whom I discuss in the next chapter, and it informed newly emerging liberal political

421 On the quarrel of perfectibility, see Lotterie, *Progrès et perfectibilité*, 137-57.
422 Kennedy, *Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of Ideology*, 117-31; François Azouvi and Dominique Bourel, *De Königsberg à Paris: La réception de Kant en France (1788-1804)* (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 231-66.
423 Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
424 Shirley M. Gruner, "Destutt de Tracy and the Science of Economics," chap. 11 in *Economic Materialism and Social Moralism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973); Martin Staum, "The Institute Economists: From Physiocracy to Entrepreneurial Capitalism," *History of Political Economy* 19, no. 4 (1987): 525-50; Philippe Nemo, "A. Destutt de Tracy critique de Montesquieu: le libéralisme économique des idéologues," *Romantisme* 36, no. 133 (2006): 25-34.

philosophies. It would also give rise to Karl Marx's canonical characterisation of Destutt de Tracy as a "fish-blooded bourgeois doctrinaire."[425]

Cabanis' ideas also had a long afterlife. The publication of *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* (1802), which included the lectures presented at the Institut national under the Directory, plus six further "memoirs," consolidated his reputation as a medical philosopher.[426] Although his successors typically rejected the materialistic implications of his ideas, his science of man inspired the works of a range of physicians, in France and elsewhere, well into the nineteenth century.[427] The publication of a posthumous letter on the question of "first causes" in 1824, in which Cabanis outlined a vitalist cosmology, also rehabilitated his thought among the still influential physicians of the Montpellier school, who had distanced themselves from the medical philosophies associated with the French Revolution.[428] Cabanis' emphasis on human difference, finally, fed into the growing interest by writers and critics once connected with the Idéologues in exploring cultural and linguistic differences between peoples. This interest led to a range of studies, from Pierre-Louis Ginguené's history of Italian literature (1811) to Claude Fauriel's study of modern Greek songs (1824-25).[429] Along with the continued interest in his ideas from medical thinkers, Cabanis' science of man thus paved the way for the emergence of anthropology and comparative ethnology as fields of study in the nineteenth century.[430]

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[425] Emmet Kennedy, ""Ideology" from Destutt de Tracy to Marx," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1979): 353-68. On Say's political economy, see the discussion in the next chapter.

[426] The liberal thinker Benjamin Constant, for one, described Cabanis' *Rapports* as "one of the most beautiful works of the century." Benjamin Constant, *Œuvres complètes. Série correspondance générale (1800-1802)* (Tübingen, M. Niemeyer, 2006), 4:555.

[427] Cabanis' *Rapports* went through eight different editions by 1844, and responses to this work would appear as late as the 1860s. For one example, see Paul-Jean Ladevi-Roche, *Réponse au livre de Cabanis sur les rapports du physique et du moral* (Paris, 1863).

[428] On the letter and its reception, see Staum, "The Metaphysical Twilight," chap. 11 in *Cabanis*. On aspects of Cabanis' nineteenth-century medical legacy more generally, see Williams, *The Physical and the Moral*, 115-75.

[429] I build here on Maurice Mauviel, "Révolution et Contre-révolution: La confrontation aux langues et cultures d'Europe et du monde," *Impacts* 1-2 (1990): 35-69; "L'Idéologue Ginguené," in *Ginguené (1748-1816): Idéologue et médiateur*, ed. Édouard Guitton (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1995), 213-22.

[430] Cabanis was among the first to employ the term *anthropologie* in French. On Cabanis' place in shaping these new fields of study, see Martin S. Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race and Empire, 1815-1848* (McGill-Queen's University Press: Montréal, 2003), 15-17. For other aspects of the intellectual legacies of the Idéologues, see

The thinker who did most to adapt and reconfigure the ideas of the Idéologues, however, was arguably Saint-Simon, a former noble turned investor in the 1790s. As I show in the next chapter, Saint-Simon took up the project of a science of society in the early nineteenth century as he sought to articulate his own solution to the disorder engendered by the French Revolution. In the initial flurry of works he composed under Napoléon, he promoted the institution of a unified system of knowledge, morality and belief in Europe as a way of pacifying social relations and supporting the continued advancement of science. Saint-Simon developed this project by combining the ideas of the Idéologues with those of their critics, the Theocrats, who maintained that social order was contingent upon submission to the dictates of religion.[431] The conceptual underpinning of this project, however, was Saint-Simon's critique of the projects of moral and political reform of the French Revolution, and his critique of Condorcet's concept of perfectibility in particular. Inspired by counter-revolutionary thought, Saint-Simon would seek to construct a new model of improvement based on the collective processes behind the development of society over time. This approach planted the seed for the shift from perfectibility to progress in the search for a science of society in France.

Kennedy, *Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of Ideology*, 208-50, 326-46; Welch, "Diaspora and Dissolution," chap. 6 in *Liberty and Utility*; Gusdorf, *La conscience révolutionnaire*, 477-503.

[431] Bee Wilson, "Counter-Revolutionary Thought," in *Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, 9-38.

4 – After Perfectibility: The Visions of Saint-Simon (and Comte)

The turn of the nineteenth century was a decisive period in the history of early French social science. Although the ideals of the Revolution inspired hitherto unimagined conceptions of the future, the rise of Napoléon, combined with the resurgence of conservative and religious public opinion, led to widespread re-evaluations of those ideals, along with the moral and philosophical principles that underpinned them. In France, as well as in Europe more generally, those re-evaluations were accompanied by a greater focus on the mechanisms and processes that influenced, if not determined, the historical development of society. A new awareness of humanity's historical temporality thus emerged. This shift in perspectives had broad cultural and political ramifications, and it shaped, among other things, the rise of Romantic sensibilities, German historicism and evolutionary theories of nature.[432] In the search for a science of society in France, this shift contributed to a move away from seeing individual human perfectibility as a crucial lever of social improvement and led to a greater focus on the collective features and attributes of modern existence. The main architect of this move was Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825).[433]

A self-taught and idiosyncratic thinker, Saint-Simon put forward an original approach to the regeneration of post-revolutionary European societies and revised earlier attempts to reform the French polity.[434] In a series of works composed under Napoléon, many of which remained in manuscript form, Saint-Simon argued that social stability in Europe required the institution of a synthetic system of knowledge and morality – "physicism" – and the replacement of the

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[432] On the rise of this new historical consciousness, see Koselleck, *Futures Past*; Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*.
[433] In the words of one scholar, Saint-Simon developed "the first great synthesis of a post-revolutionary science of society." Wokler, "Ideology and the Origins of Social Science," 707.
[434] On Saint-Simon's social thought, see Baker, "Closing the French Revolution"; Wokler, "Saint-Simon and the Passage from Political to Social Science"; Pierre Musso, *Télécommunications et philosophie des réseaux: la postérité paradoxale de Saint-Simon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998); *La religion du monde industriel: analyse de la pensée de Saint-Simon* (La Tour-d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 2006). For classic accounts of his philosophies of history and progress, see Samuel Bernstein, "Saint Simon's Philosophy of History," *Science & Society* 12, no. 1 (1948): 82-96; Walter M. Simon, "History for Utopia: Saint-Simon and the Idea of Progress," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 3 (1956): 311-31. See also Frank Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

Christian Church by a newly constituted class of secular *savants*, in charge of public education. Under the Restoration, he adapted this approach and promoted the idea of an alliance between the *savants* and those involved in productive and economic activities, the "industrial" class, as a means of furthering human happiness and superseding the need for government. In the early 1820s, he suggested that this alliance also required artists, who would be responsible for promoting this project in society, before finally settling on the view that it called for the establishment of a new Christianity. Although he was on the margins of the political and scientific establishment of his time, Saint-Simon attracted a small and influential group of followers, and his ideas laid the foundations for the emergence of positivism and early French socialism.[435]

This chapter examines Saint-Simon's successive visions of progress and, in doing so, traces changes and continuities in the models of improvement that underpinned early French social science. The first iteration of Saint-Simon's project of social reform was inspired by Condorcet's future-oriented philosophy of history, and it looked to the advent of humanity's scientific capabilities. Saint-Simon nonetheless repudiated Condorcet's conception of perfectibility and revived a cyclical theory of progress and decline. He also combined, in a singular way, concepts derived from the Idéologues and from the Theocrats, such as Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald, who argued that order in society required the moral bind of religion. In the later iteration of his thought, under the Restoration, Saint-Simon reconfigured his approach by drawing on contemporary ideas of political economy and insisted that society was impelled by a continuous and irreversible law of civilisation. This new vision of progress built on Sieyès' theory of the division of labour and sought to bring it into line with Saint-Simon's conception of social

[435] Henri Gouhier, *Saint-Simon jusqu'à la Restauration*, vol. 2, *La jeunesse d'Auguste Comte et la formation du positivisme* (Paris: Vrin, 1936); Pierre Musso, "Saint-Simon, socialisme et industrialisme," in *Les socialismes*, eds. Juliette Grange and Pierre Musso (Lormont: Le Bord de l'eau, 2012), 17-35.

stability and harmony. The outcome was an ambitious project of moral renewal that promised an end to all relations of domination.

This chapter builds on previous interpretations of Saint-Simon's thought. The recent publication of the complete edition of his works has nonetheless allowed me to provide a more fine-tuned analysis of his philosophy and its development.[436] A range of previously unpublished texts show the extent to which Saint-Simon adapted the ideas of the Idéologues in the early nineteenth century, an intellectual legacy that that was only partially understood before. These reveal that Saint-Simon developed the distinction between analytical and synthetic forms of reasoning, which inspired the distinction between "organic" and "critical" ages of history later advanced by his followers, by drawing on Cabanis' conception of sensibility. Access to the full range of works he composed under the Restoration also underscores the uniformity and consistency of his later approach. The exclusion of one of the texts usually attributed to Saint-Simon – the first part of an essay on the application of physiology to social reform – nonetheless lends weight to the view that he did not promote a straightforward analogy of society as a living organism.[437] There was in fact a tension, in his later works, between an "organic" model of social organisation, which suggested that society should be organised along principles of functional differentiation and hierarchy, and one that pointed to the equalisation of social and economic conditions.

This more nuanced interpretation of Saint-Simon's philosophy also allows for a better understanding of its nineteenth-century legacies. Auguste Comte, Saint-Simon's assistant between 1817 and 1824, set out the principles of his positivist philosophy by fusing different elements of Saint-Simon's early and later visions of progress. The break between the pair in the 1820s was spurred by a disagreement over the relative priority of science and industry in the

[436] Saint-Simon, *Œuvres complètes* (hereafter *OC*), eds. Pierre Musso, Juliette Grange, Philippe Régnier and Franck Yonnet, 4 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012).
[437] The text in question is the first part of the essay originally published under the title "De la physiologie appliquée à l'amélioration des institutions sociales" (1825). The first part of the work was written by Étienne Bailly, not Saint-Simon, and is not included in Saint-Simon's *Œuvres complètes*.

perfection of human society, and this dispute revived, in a new form, the distinction between the models of improvement previously examined in this thesis. Likewise, the set of disagreements that later developed between Saint-Simon's followers, and which are the subject of the next chapter, built on the changing focus of his project of reform and regeneration. Whether positivist or socialist, they all concurred that social improvement was primarily a condition of the development of collective institutions and modes of belief. They followed, in other words, Saint-Simon's repudiation of the individual approach associated with the revolutionary discourse of perfectibility, and they sought to construct projects of reform predicated on the general patterns, if not the laws, behind the progress of society over time.

The first part of this chapter explores the philosophy of progress behind Saint-Simon's early approach to social and scientific improvement. I explore the principles of this philosophy by examining his three-part critique Condorcet's *Esquisse*, and I outline the ways in which it combined and adapted the ideas of both the Idéologues and the Theocrats. The second part of this chapter turns to the later model of social improvement Saint-Simon developed under the Restoration. I investigate the intellectual origins of this approach, comparing it to Maistrian aetiology. I also show that, although Saint-Simon drew on the political economy of Jean-Baptiste Say and the liberal ideas of Benjamin Constant, he conceived of representative government as a transitional stage on the path towards humanity's final and definitive social state, what he called the "industrial and scientific regime." The last section of this chapter analyses the dispute between Saint-Simon and Comte, and it shows that it re-actualised long-running debates in the search for a science of society in France. It also brings to light the tensions in Saint-Simon's later conception of progress and demonstrates how these shaped connected but distinct strands of nineteenth-century thought.

The Advent of Physicism

Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon was born in 1760 into a poor noble family from Paris. Having fought as a young man in the American War of Independence, he joined the revolutionary cause after the fall of the Bastille, and abandoned his title. He then became involved in various speculative schemes and investments, through which he enriched himself. Imprisoned for a year during the Terror, he was released following the fall of Robespierre. After becoming bankrupt in the late 1790s, Saint-Simon turned his attention to scientific study and attended public lectures in Paris. Briefly married, he travelled to Switzerland in 1802 shortly after his divorce and is said to have proposed to Germaine de Staël, whose own husband had recently died. It was there that he composed *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève à ses contemporains* (1803), a short text in which he called for the establishment of an international scientific congress and the unification of knowledge around the principle of universal gravitation.[438] This would be the first of a series of works in which Saint-Simon suggested that leading European scientists, or *savants*, take on the mantel of a "spiritual power" and further the moral and intellectual regeneration of post-revolutionary societies.

The ideas Saint-Simon put forward in *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève* and the works that followed built on his assessment of the French Revolution. Although he argued that it had been necessary to remedy the abuses of the monarchy, he attributed the Revolution's descent into disorder and violence to an excessive emphasis on principles of equality and the lack of a cohesive system to replace the institutions of the Ancien Régime.[439] In a recently unearthed text, composed around 1805, Saint-Simon also insisted that the intellectuals who sought to consolidate republican government after the Terror had held "sound ideas of politics and administration," but they had been better skilled at theory than at practice. The coup of 18 Brumaire had been a salutary

[438] Saint-Simon, *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève à ses contemporains* [1802-03], *OC*, 1:101-28. On Saint-Simon's early life, see *OC*, 4:3269-86.
[439] Saint-Simon, *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*, 112-13, 121.

development, he also claimed in this text, as it had saved France from the inequities and despotism that a return to monarchy would have entailed.[440] While Saint-Simon hoped that Napoleonic rule would stabilise and pacify social relations, both in France and in Europe, he maintained that this end also necessitated the unification of the system of knowledge and the development of a common programme of moral and intellectual renewal. It was only on this basis, he claimed, that European societies could be stabilised, pacified and perfected.

The vision of progress Saint-Simon elaborated in his early works, in the period between 1802 and 1813, was centred on the advent of the scientific doctrine he called "physicism." Drawing on his brief and self-directed scientific education, Saint-Simon claimed that all phenomena were the product of physical causes and that they could be explained by recourse to Newton's law of universal gravitation. This law could therefore provide the first principle of every branch of knowledge, he argued, and ensure their passage from a "conjectural" to a "positive" state. Thus re-constituted, Saint-Simon maintained that modern scientific disciplines would be united by a common doctrine and its practitioners could work together to further advance their knowledge, as well as to direct and reform the existing system of public education. The elaboration of this doctrine was the key to the stabilisation of the European social order, according to Saint-Simon, as it would put contemporary *savants* in a position to institute a "positive" moral doctrine and regenerate the dogmas of the Church. Replacing the doctrine of Original Sin, Saint-Simon suggested that this doctrine would promote enlightened self-interest and social pacification through the common, and mutually beneficial, pursuit of science.

As well as being a response to the French Revolution, this project was shaped by Saint-Simon's evaluation of eighteenth-century conceptions of human improvement. As Saint-Simon remarked in another newly discovered text, the thinker who had done the most to arouse dissent against

[440] Saint-Simon, "Le passé, le présent et l'avenir" [MS, c. 1805], *OC*, 1:199-211.

prevailing prejudices before the Revolution had been Rousseau. Although Rousseau had shown that the existing "social system was vicious in all its parts," Saint-Simon insisted that he had failed to provide an alternative to it. Saint-Simon also claimed that, since Rousseau, one "great idea" of reform had appeared, and this was Condorcet's idea that the *savants* should take charge of the moral and intellectual regeneration of society.[441] While he praised Condorcet's *Esquisse*, which he described as "one of the most beautiful works on the human mind" and one that had served to dismantle "circular" philosophies of history, Saint-Simon argued that it was nonetheless "defective in all its details." This was the case, he claimed, because Condorcet had been under the influence of "French levellers," and the *Esquisse* had become "a diatribe against kings and priests."[442]

Saint-Simon alluded to the shortcomings of Condorcet's *Esquisse* in various places in his early works, but he gave it the most systematic attention in a letter from 1811 addressed to his one-time financier Sigismund Ehrenreich Johann von Redern, which he intended to publish as part of a series of letters with the title *Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales*.[443] In this letter to Redern, Saint-Simon identified three mistakes in the *Esquisse* – the epistemological starting point of the work, its treatment of religion and its account of human perfectibility – and he articulated the principles of his own vision of progress alongside this critique. The ideas Saint-Simon developed in this letter also bring to light one of the key tensions in this vision. Although Saint-Simon built on Condorcet's philosophy of history, he sought to refute Condorcet's principle of indefinite human perfectibility by appealing to an analogy between the development of individual and collective faculties. Saint-Simon's early vision of progress thus looked to the advent of

441 Saint-Simon, "Lettres de deux philanthropes" [MS, c. 1804], *OC*, 1:150, n. 92, 969.
442 Saint-Simon, *Introduction aux travaux scientifiques du XIX^e siècle. Tome premier* [1808], *OC*, 1:268-69; *Introduction aux travaux scientifiques du XIX^e siècle. Tome second* [1808], *OC*, 1:383. See also "Project d'encyclopédie. Deuxième aperçu" [MS, c. 1808-1809], *OC*, 1:525.
443 Saint-Simon to Redern, 12 November 1811, in "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales" [1811-12], *OC*, 1:808-36. On the context behind these letters and their publication history, see *OC*, 1:788-89. On Saint-Simon's critique of Condorcet, see also Jean-Pierre Schandeler, "Critique de *l'Esquisse* et genèse de la réfutation des Lumières," in *Condorcet: Homme des Lumières et de la Révolution*, 161-77.

humanity's rational and scientific capabilities, but also pointed to the inevitable demise and degeneration of the human species in time.

Saint-Simon's critique of Condorcet followed the shift in public opinion towards the revolutionary discourse of perfectibility. As discussed in the previous chapter, this shift was driven by opposition to the philosophy of the Idéologues and, more generally, to the anti-religious sentiments of the proponents of perfectibility in the 1790s. The critics of the discourse of perfectibility also drew on the works of the Theocrats, who argued that social cohesion was impossible without either religion or the sovereign authority of a monarch.[444] Saint-Simon built on these views, and he opposed Condorcet's evaluation of the evils of religion. He did not, however, called for the revival of Christianity in his early works, nor did he promote the restoration of the monarchy. As I discuss below, the vision of progress he developed in his early works drew heavily, if originally, on the thought of Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis. Saint-Simon would, in this way, articulate a model of social improvement focused on the collective mechanisms of progress, yet rooted in claims about the nature of individual faculties and capacities.

The Domination of the savants

Condorcet's first mistake in the *Esquisse*, according to Saint-Simon, was that he had misconstrued the starting point of the history of the human mind. In his work, Condorcet had assumed that "the first generation of the human species" was already capable of language, Saint-Simon maintained, yet this institution had in fact taken a long time to emerge.[445] With reference to several examples – the mind of newborns, the intellectual abilities of the "wild boy" of Aveyron

[444] Philipe Nemo, "Les "théocrates": Bonald et Maistre," in *Histoire des idées politiques aux temps modernes et contemporains* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002), 1051-80; Florence Lotterie, "L'ordre et le progrès: perfectibilité et contre-revolution," *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturegeschichte, Cahiers d'Histoire des Littératures Romanes* 24, n. 1/2 (2000): 25-33. See also Bee Wilson, "Counter-Revolutionary Thought"; Armenteros, *French Idea of History*; W. Jay Reedy, "The Historical Imaginary of Social Science in Post-Revolutionary France: Bonald, Saint-Simon, Comte," *History of the Human Sciences* 7, no. 1 (1994): 1-26.
[445] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 811-12.

and so-called "savage" peoples – Saint-Simon insisted that humans, in their original condition, had in fact been in "the most absolute state of ignorance." If Condorcet had taken this as his starting point, Saint-Simon claimed, he would have been able to develop an account based on "facts" and "solid observations," and retrace the progress of the human mind "from the first generation of the species."[446]

This first point of contention was both historical and epistemological in nature, and it pointed to Saint-Simon's disagreement with the disciplinary distinction with which Condorcet's *Esquisse* opened. This work indeed began with an account of individual faculties of mind, but Condorcet immediately set this account, which he described as being the remit of metaphysics, aside to pursue a history of the progress of knowledge starting at "the first stage of civilisation," when human beings already lived in a small society.[447] Although Condorcet developed a detailed analysis of individual faculties of mind in one of the draft texts composed around the same time as the *Esquisse*, as I examined in chapter two, this text would not be published until the 1840s. Saint-Simon thus criticised Condorcet for not going back far enough and for not explaining why humans were "the only animal whose intelligence had become developed."[448] He then went on to suggest his own explanation for this development, and he did so in a way that supported one of the key principles of his early vision of progress: the necessary dominance in society of those endowed with the highest intellectual capacities, the *savants*.

The proper starting point of human history, Saint-Simon maintained, was the place of human beings on what he called the "scale of organisation." By locating them on this scale, he suggested, it was possible to determine the faculties with which humans were originally endowed as well as explain the reasons for their development. With reference to Buffon, as well as the

[446] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 812-15. On the famous case of Victor from Aveyron, see Harlan Lane, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1977); Chappey, *Sauvagerie et civilisation*.
[447] Condorcet, "Sketch," 1-2.
[448] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 815.

contemporary naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and the phrenologist Franz-Joseph Gall, Saint-Simon claimed that it was by "imperceptible nuances" that each creature was endowed with a more complex form of organisation. He also insisted that, in "the first generation of organised bodies," the scale of organisation was directly replicated in the scale of intelligence between different creatures. According to Saint-Simon, this correspondence of "the physical" and "the moral" lasted only momentarily, however, because the most intelligent species inevitably placed itself in circumstances that favoured its own progress, while simultaneously undermining the development of other species, and this led over time to an ever-widening gap between the species at the top and every other creature. This was the reason, he claimed, for the great disparity in intelligence that currently prevailed between humans and animals.[449]

Whatever its plausibility, Saint-Simon's account built on the Idéologues' interest in the intellectual capacities of animal species, as well as in the comparative degree of intelligence of different human beings. Although Destutt de Tracy had limited his study of the mind to the different "states of human reason," at the turn of the nineteenth century the physician Jacques-Philippe-Raymond Draparnaud proposed the elaboration of a "comparative analysis of the ideas and faculties of animals," or what he called a "comparative *idéologie*."[450] This project was never carried out, but Cabanis praised Draparnaud's plan in *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* (1802) and noted that it promised to establish "the respective degree of intelligence, or sensibility, of different races" and thereby determine their status "on the ideological ladder."[451] Although Cabanis did not articulate a strong position on human racial difference in his writings,

[449] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 815-17.
[450] Draparnaud, "Plan d'un cours de grammaire generale, par Draparnaud," (c. 1799), cited in Julien Vincent, "L'animal des Idéologues, par-delà nature et culture (1794-1804)," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 392, no. 2 (2018): 54. Saint-Simon's examples of different states of ignorance evoked Destutt de Tracy's discussion of different "states of human reason," and he also alluded to examples of young children who had grown up "in the woods." Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 401-10.
[451] Cabanis, *Rapports* (1802), 2:467.

these remarks pointed to the affinity between his version of *idéologie* and growing contemporary interest in the supposedly unequal abilities of different human "races."[452]

Saint-Simon made no reference to Draparnaud in his letter to Redern, and he may well have derived the idea of a scale of intelligence from Lamarck, who mentioned it in his work, or from Gall, who had recently delivered a popular set of lectures on phrenology in Paris.[453] The ideas Lamarck and Gall developed at the turn of the century nonetheless built on the Idéologues' theory of the mind. In Lamarck's case, the debt was explicit and, in the eyes of at least one scholar, his works represented an extension of "the *idéologue* perspective to the whole animal kingdom."[454] Crucially, however, the Idéologues appealed to the concept of perfectibility to account for the development of human faculties in general, and of knowledge in particular. Saint-Simon, in contrast, did not mention this concept to explain the human capacity for improvement. This capacity, in his view, was the product of the ability of the human species to subjugate other living creatures and place itself in the most favourable circumstances for its own development. In place of perfectibility, Saint-Simon presented human intellectual advancement as the outcome of a necessary and inevitable process of domination.

Saint-Simon did not elaborate on the implications of this view in his critique of Condorcet, but this view aligned with the ideas he put forward in his other early works.[455] In *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*, Saint-Simon had argued that the "desire for domination" was a well-established "physiological fact," and he appealed to this fact to justify the superiority of an intellectual and

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[452] On this trend, see Claude Blanckaert, "1800 – Le moment "naturaliste" des sciences de l'homme," *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 3, no. 2 (2000): 117-60; Staum, *Labeling People*.

[453] Gall promoted the idea that individual intelligence and temperament reflected the respective size of localised parts of the brain, and his views bolstered justifications of inequalities of race, sex and class, and their entrenchment. Angus McLaren, "A Prehistory of the Social Sciences: Phrenology in France," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 1 (1981): 3-22; Martin Staum, "Physiognomy and Phrenology at the Paris Athénée," *Journal of History of Ideas* 56, no. 3 (1995): 443-62.

[454] Ludmilla Jordanova, *Lamarck* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 78. On Gall as a follower of the Idéologues, see Edwin Clarke and L. S. Jacyna, *Nineteenth-Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), 270-72.

[455] The natural hierarchy of species also formed the basis for the stadial account of progress Saint-Simon put forward in *Mémoire sur la science de l'homme* [MS, c. 1813], *OC*, 2:1130-31.

scientific elite in society, or what he described as "the redistribution of domination in proportion to enlightenment." He also maintained that humans were naturally self-interested creatures and any theorist who sought to "destroy egoism" rather than redirect it towards the common interest was misguided.[456] Although these ideas resonated with Destutt de Tracy's earlier approach, Saint-Simon connected them to claims that were at odds with the views of the architect of *idéologie*. In contrast to Destutt de Tracy, Saint-Simon argued that the natural superiority of humans over animals was replicated in the superiority of Europeans over other "varieties" of humans because of their supposedly predominant intellectual capacities. French revolutionaries had thus been mistaken, he claimed, in promoting the principle of racial equality, and especially the equality of Europeans and "blacks" [*sic*]. This principle, according to Saint-Simon, contradicted "the facts observed by physiologists."[457]

There was a logical continuity, for Saint-Simon, between the idea that the superiority of humans over animals reflected a natural principle of hierarchy and the claim that certain forms of inequality and domination were legitimate, if not necessary, in society. As he saw it, in the same way as the species that stood at the top of the scale of natural organisation dominated other living beings, so within the human species itself those who were the most enlightened should naturally, and therefore justifiably, dominate others. Despite promoting the diffusion of knowledge in his early works, and hence the potential diffusion of social and political power, Saint-Simon maintained that those "with the most cerebral energy" should take charge of the moral and intellectual regeneration of post-revolutionary societies, that they should be entrusted with a higher degree of consideration and leadership and, thus, that they replace the Church and

[456] Saint-Simon, *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*, 118-19, 119-20, n. 1.
[457] Saint-Simon, *Introduction aux travaux scientifiques. Tome second*, 377-78, 412. See also *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*, 121, n. a.

become the "spiritual power" in Europe.[458] These ideas, as he presented them in his early works, went hand in hand with a justification of European racial and civilisational superiority.

Saint-Simon's approach was an obvious departure from Condorcet's philosophy. Although Condorcet emphasised that knowledge was a legitimate source of moral, if not political, authority, he had argued in the *Esquisse* that human progress would see the diffusion of knowledge and the equalisation of capacities, both between the sexes and within and between societies.[459] Saint-Simon similarly highlighted the connection between intellectual and moral improvement, but he underlined the hierarchical and unequal implications of this relationship and made no mention of the equality between men and women. While this approach evoked Destutt de Tracy's approach, Saint-Simon linked his own justification of the social dominance of the *savants* to a claim about the superiority of both humans over animals and Europeans over the rest of humanity. This shift in perspectives followed broader contemporary trends in France, which included the reintroduction of noble titles, the reinstatement of slavery and renewed French imperialism.[460] In a more direct way, however, Saint-Simon's views brought together Cabanis' emphasis on human physiological difference and Destutt de Tracy's concern with rule by an enlightened elite. Saint-Simon's early model of improvement thus represented, at least in part, a synthesis of the two versions of *idéologie*.

The Doctrine of Physicism

The next mistake Saint-Simon attributed to Condorcet's *Esquisse* was that it mischaracterised the role of religious institutions in history. Condorcet presented these as an "obstacle to the happiness of humanity," Saint-Simon explained, but this was "entirely false," and these

[458] These views echoed Helvétius' earlier call for bringing together "temporal" and "spiritual" powers. Saint-Simon, *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*, 110-11, 122.
[459] Condorcet outlined these views in the famed tenth chaper of the *Esquisse*, which I examined in chapter two.
[460] Jean-Luc Chappey, "Révolution, régénération, civilisation: enjeux culturels des dynamiques politiques," in *Pour quoi faire la révolution*, eds. Jean-Luc Chappey, Bernard Gainot, Guillaume Mazeau, Frédéric Régent and Pierre Serna (Marseille: Agone, 2012), 115-48.

institutions had in fact served to "civilise" the human species. As he went on to argue, Christianity had restored "the mores of the Romans," contributed to the "civilisation of the barbarian inhabitants of the North" and supported the development of agriculture and public sanitation throughout European societies. Religions had their periods of "infancy," "vigour" and "decadence" like other institutions, Saint-Simon maintained, and it was only in this latter stage that they became detrimental to human society. He also insisted, finally, that Condorcet's wholesale rejection of religion was misguided because religions were what he called, rather cryptically, "materialised philosophical systems," and to see them as "essentially vicious" was therefore equivalent to seeing philosophical systems in general as vicious.[461]

Saint-Simon's second point of contention with Condorcet ran several different claims together. Each of these requires careful analysis. The first part of this critique related to Saint-Simon's disagreement with the anti-religious sentiments behind Condorcet's work. As previously discussed, one of the central themes of the *Esquisse* was the struggle between truth and error, or enlightenment and superstition, and Condorcet in this work virulently condemned religions for propagating misleading ideas, undermining individual rights and thus retarding human progress. Drawing on contemporary re-evaluations of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, Saint-Simon opposed this characterisation and lauded the historical advances made possible by Christian beliefs and values.[462] Against Condorcet's unilateral opposition to religion, Saint-Simon proposed a more relativist approach to social improvement and suggested that religious institutions had varying benefits, depending on their stage of development. He thus moved away from the universal and immutable principles of individual right of late eighteenth-century social

[461] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 817.
[462] In context of the revival of religious and spiritual public opinion, conservative writers like Chateaubriand hailed Christianity for its role in the progress of human society, while liberal thinkers, such as Germaine de Staël, highlighted the connection between early Christianity and European civilisation. Lucian Robinson, "Accounts of Early Christian History in the Thought of François Guizot, Benjamin Constant and Madame de Staël 1800-c.1833," *History of European Ideas* 43, no. 6 (August 2017): 635-39.

science and emphasised instead the changing systems of thought and belief that underpinned the collective development of human society over time.

Whilst he followed contemporary re-evaluations of Christianity, however, Saint-Simon did not promote its revival or regeneration in his early works. The force of reasoning of religious apologists such as Bonald or François-René de Chateaubriand was to be praised, Saint-Simon admitted in *Introduction aux travaux scientifiques du XIX^e^ siècle* (1808), but their views were nonetheless based on a "fundamental mistake": that the solution to stabilising post-revolutionary societies lay in the restoration of Christian institutions and beliefs. Saint-Simon also insisted that while Bonald had correctly perceived "the utility of the systematic unity" of literary and scientific works, this unity could no longer be predicated on religion. The conception with "the strongest unitary character," as he put it, was now exclusively the preserve of "the idea of universal gravitation."[463] Saint-Simon's disagreement with Condorcet's anti-religious sentiments was therefore not intended to advance the views of counter-revolutionary critics, but rather to bolster his own project of moral and intellectual reform. To explain the principles of this project, it is worth turning to the second part of Saint-Simon's critique of Condorcet's treatment of religion.

As mentioned, after emphasising the historical benefits of Christianity, Saint-Simon suggested that religions could be considered "materialised philosophical systems." Although the meaning of this description was not self-evident, and Saint-Simon did not elaborate what he meant, it can be elucidated by turning to the philosophy of history he developed in his other early works. This philosophy centred on the idea that the progress of knowledge was divided into stages, each of which was defined by a particular theory of first causes. Saint-Simon developed this idea by drawing on his interpretation of Charles-François Dupuis' *Origine de tous les cultes, ou la religion universelle* (1795), a popular work of history and mythology which argued that all human religions

[463] Saint-Simon, *Introduction aux travaux scientifiques. Tome second*, 394, 400.

originally derived from a cult of nature and the observation of celestial phenomena.[464] For Saint-Simon, Dupuis' "beautiful work" had "clearly and solidly proven" that religions were based on "astronomical facts." Saint-Simon also insisted, although Dupuis had not himself developed this point, that *Origine de tous les cultes* had shown that improvements in theories of first causes brought about improvements in the "whole of human knowledge."[465]

Building on these views, Saint-Simon suggested that the history of human knowledge was structured by the progress of successive belief-systems, and, specifically, the linear transition from one theory of first causes to another.[466] This history consisted of the transition from idolatry, in which humans believed in "a large number of independent causes," to polytheism, in which all causes were considered "fractions of a common whole," to monotheism and deism, or the belief in a "universal and single cause."[467] The final stage in this history, according to Saint-Simon, would see the emergence of "physicism," or the system according to which all phenomena could be explained according to the law of universal gravitation.[468] The advent of this system would ensure the transition of every branch of knowledge from a "conjectural" to a "positive" state, he claimed, or one in which scientific facts were derived solely from observation and the law of universal gravitation. Saint-Simon also insisted that once it had been systematically developed by the *savants*, the doctrine of physicism would make it possible to re-establish "all the principles of practical morality taught by theology" and promote the principles of enlightened self-interest and the pursuit of the common good.[469]

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[464] Charles-François Dupuis, *Origine de tous les cultes, ou la religion universelle* (Paris, 1795).
[465] Saint-Simon, "Histoire de l'homme. Premier brouillon" [MS, c. 1810], *OC*, 1:704. See also, *Mémoire sur la science de l'homme*, 1081-82.
[466] Saint-Simon, "Projet d'Encylopédie [et] histoire des progrès de l'esprit humain" [MS, c. 1808-1809], *OC*, 1:553.
[467] Saint-Simon "Project d'encyclopédie. Deuxième aperçu," 528; *Nouvelle encyclopédie. Premier livraison servant de prospectus* [1810], *OC*, 1:586-87; *Mémoire sur la science de l'homme*, 1088, 1133, 1152.
[468] Saint-Simon, "Projet d'Encylopédie [et] histoire des progrès de l'esprit humain," 553; *Travail sur la gravitation universelle. Moyen de forcer les Anglais à reconnaître l'indépendance des pavillons* [MS, c. 1813], *OC*, 1:1223-24.
[469] Saint-Simon, *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, 1216. On the transition from "conjectural" to "positive" knowledge, see "Projet d'Encylopédie [et] histoire des progrès de l'esprit humain," 545-47; *Mémoire sur la science de l'homme*, 1075; *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, 1205. On the moral principles that would be diffused by the *savants*, see *Mémoire sur la science de l'homme*, 1095, 1175; *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, 1197.

Saint-Simon promoted the advent of this new doctrine throughout his early works, and these culminated in two lengthy manuscript texts, *Mémoire sur la science de l'homme* and *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, both composed in 1813.[470] It was these texts that also shed light on what Saint-Simon meant by religions as "materialised philosophical systems." The state of moral and political crisis in Europe, he explained, required the harmonisation of the existing system of knowledge, but this system could no longer be based on Christian theology, because of all of its putative errors and "contradictions." The founding principle of the doctrine of physicism – the law of universal gravitation – was nonetheless not in opposition with the idea of God, he argued, and it could be understood as the "immutable law by which God governed the universe."[471] Continuing this line of thought, Saint-Simon suggested that, in the fuller version of the work he intended to write, he would show that "we have until now called *spiritualists* those who should have been called *materialists*," and vice versa. "Indeed," he went on, "is not incorporating [*corporifier*] an abstraction, being a materialist? And is not extracting the idea of *law*, from the being of *God*, being a spiritualist?"[472]

Contesting the meaning of contemporary philosophical descriptors, Saint-Simon suggested that conventional religions should in fact be described as "materialist," while the doctrine of physicism could, by implication, be conceived as "spiritualist." Inverting the usual distinctions, Saint-Simon intimated that the advent of his doctrine would overcome, if not nullify, the terms of the debate between partisans and opponents of the revival of Christianity and of "spiritualist" ideals more generally in the early nineteenth century.[473] In *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, Saint-Simon nonetheless promoted the affinity of physicism with a belief in God for more practical

[470] Around sixty copies of these texts are thought to have been composed and sent to eminent scientists and intellectuals of the day. For the full list, see *OC*, 2:1067, n. (4).
[471] Saint-Simon, *Mémoire sur la science de l'homme*, 1147, 1148-49; *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, 1216.
[472] Saint-Simon, *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, 1224.
[473] On this debate, which was nonetheless often carried out by substituting the term *matérialisme* for *sensualisme*, see Pierre F. Daled, *Le matérialisme occulté et la genèse du "sensualisme": Écrire l'histoire de la philosophie en France* (Paris: Vrin, 2005).

ends. While the idea of God could no longer unite scientific conceptions, he argued, it was important to present the idea of universal gravitation as a law of God so that it would not conflict "with the superstitious ideas of the class of the poor."[474] This implied that the doctrine of physicism was to be conceived in one way by the *savants*, and in another by the uneducated class in society. Saint-Simon thus revived the idea of a "double doctrine," an idea forcefully criticised by Condorcet in the *Esquisse*, and proposed that physicism conform with a belief in God only to further its diffusion in society.

Despite his defence of Christianity, and his attempt to present his system as a "spiritualist" doctrine, Saint-Simon's conception of physicism combined ideas derived from both Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis. This was not immediately apparent from the remarks in his second point of disagreement with Condorcet, but the range of works that he composed in the early nineteenth century, which are now available in print, reveal the extent of his debt to them. The idea of a double doctrine notably echoed Destutt de Tracy's earlier model of human improvement, which was similarly structured by the distinction between the capacities of two different classes. The epistemological underpinnings of Saint-Simon's doctrine of physicism also resonated with those of Destutt de Tracy's *idéologie*. In "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," Destutt de Tracy had suggested that the perfection of knowledge consisted in the ability to bring different branches of thought back to first principles. Citing the example of astronomy, he conjectured that it might one day be possible to reduce every branch of knowledge to "a single principle," and that if the "whole of human science" was comprised of "a small number of propositions," these, in turn, might be derived from "one primary proposition."[475]

In line with this approach, Saint-Simon argued that a single idea could unite and harmonise different branches of thought. He was nonetheless critical of the theory of knowledge of

[474] Saint-Simon, *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, 1224. For similar statements, see *Introduction aux travaux scientifiques. Tome second*, 402-05; *Nouvelle encyclopédie. Première livraison*, 593.
[475] Destutt de Tracy, "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," 391-92.

Condillac – and through Condillac, of Destutt de Tracy – which he argued paid too much attention to "analysis," and not enough to "synthesis."[476] According to Saint-Simon, both modes of reasoning had to be employed to develop a "positive" system of knowledge. Saint-Simon supported this claim by formulating an original approach that drew on Cabanis' physiology. Borrowing from his conception of human sensibility, Saint-Simon claimed that the "action of external bodies" on individual senses was the source of factual knowledge about the world, while the "action of vital force," through which sensations radiated "from our centre to our circumference," generated ideas that could be employed to connect facts with each other. External sensibility thus produced what Saint-Simon called *a posteriori* notions, which were the basis for analytical thought, while internal sensibility engendered *a priori* conceptions, which underpinned synthetic reasoning.[477] Although the human mind historically oscillated between analysis and synthesis, or what his followers would later call "critical" and "organic" periods, Saint-Simon argued that they were both of equal value in a "positive" system of knowledge.

In addition to this, Saint-Simon departed from Destutt de Tracy in claiming to have discovered the general idea that could unify and harmonise contemporary branches of thought. While Destutt de Tracy considered this idea unlikely to ever be discovered, Saint-Simon confidently declared that it could be derived from the law underlying all physical motion, universal gravitation.[478] In this assertion, Saint-Simon re-joined the Theocrats. The Idéologues were, on the whole, averse to statements of ontological and epistemological certainty. Saint-Simon was less circumspect, and he followed Bonald in suggesting that the "systematic unity" of

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476 Saint-Simon "Mémoire sur science de l'homme," 1188-90. See also *Introduction aux travaux scientifiques. Tome premier*, 256-60, 296, 300.

477 Saint-Simon, "Travail sur la gravitation universelle", 1183-84. Saint-Simon derived this distinction directly from Cabanis, whose definition of "internal" sensibility he praised as having "very well refuted" the theory of knowledge behind all major works of eighteenth-century philosophy, and whom he cited at length. Saint-Simon, "Sur la science générale" [MS, c. 1810], *OC*, 1:639; "Projet d'encyclopédie. Seconde livraison" [MS, c. 1810], *OC*, 1:667-82, 686-87. For the later reiteration of this distinction, see Saint-Simon [and Augustin Thierry], *De la réorganisation de la société européenne* [1814], *OC*, 2:1261.

478 Saint-Simon, *Nouvelle encyclopédie. Première livraison*, 588. According to Saint-Simon, while there were two classes of phenomena in the universe – "solids" and "fluids" – there was only one order in nature, "the physical order." *Introduction aux travaux scientifiques. Tome second*, 378.

contemporary works was the necessary condition for the regeneration of post-revolutionary European societies. Unlike Bonald, and in contrast to the Theocrats in general, Saint-Simon called for the replacement and supersession of the Christian religion by a new theory of first causes: the doctrine of physicism. Whether or not it aligned with a belief in God, it was the development of this doctrine and its diffusion in society, he claimed, that would stabilise social relations and ensure the further perfection of knowledge. The condition for progress, in other words, was the advent of a new collective and uniform system of thought.

Progress and Decline

Saint-Simon's last point of disagreement with Condorcet's *Esquisse* was the most important, he declared, and related to the work's "master idea": that the human mind was capable of indefinite perfectibility. This idea was "false," according to Saint-Simon, because "the faculties the mind acquires do not accumulate on top of those it already possessed," they only "replaced those that the mind loses."[479] Evidence for this, he went on to suggest, could be found in comparing the achievements of the Ancients and the Moderns. The former had excelled in certain types of cultural and imaginative expression, according to Saint-Simon, and they had displayed a great degree of religious devotion and military vigour. The latter, in contrast, had perfected the rational capacities of the human mind, and they were "very superior" in "physical and mathematical sciences, as well as in the law of nations, politics and morality."[480] Invoking the terms of the earlier "quarrel" of the Ancients and the Moderns, which had recently been revived in the dispute over the revolutionary discourse of perfectibility, Saint-Simon suggested that social improvement was not irreversible, as Condorcet had implied in the *Esquisse*, and that history witnessed the relative perfection and degradation of different aspects of social life.[481]

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[479] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 818.
[480] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 818-21.
[481] On the "quarrel" of the Ancients and the Moderns, see Edelstein, "Quarrel in the Academy: The Ancients Strike Back," chap. 5 in *The Enlighenment*.

Saint-Simon developed this point by advancing an alternative philosophy of history. Having expressed his disagreement with Condorcet's conception of perfectibility, he argued that the development of human knowledge was not linear because it followed "the same law as that of individual intelligence." According to Saint-Simon, Condorcet had thus misunderstood the arc of progress:

> [Condorcet] did not realise that it was, in the species as in the individual, at the expense of the imagination that reason made its progress; that the human species had its infancy, during which it learned to read and write; its childhood, when it played at erecting great piles of rocks (the pyramids of Egypt); its adolescence and its puberty, when it produced masterpieces in the fine arts; that it had reached its mature age, the period of the complete development of its analytical forces, a happy period in which imagination, though slightly weakened, was not yet extinguished and preserved enough strength to soften reason; that our generation, in one word, featured in history as the time in which the species had finished growing in life, but had not yet begun to decline.[482]

Refuting the idea of cumulative improvement, Saint-Simon suggested that the human species transitioned, like individuals, from a state of ignorance to one of rudimentary knowledge, and from a more imaginative state to one in which its rational and analytical faculties predominated. This pattern of development served to explain the comparative achievements of the Ancients and the Moderns, and it supported the idea that contemporary societies had reached the highest degree of maturity of the human species.

Although an age-old idea, Saint-Simon's analogy between individual and collective faculties may have drawn inspiration from Bonald, who had recently appealed to this analogy to support his own philosophy of history.[483] While Bonald associated the mature state of society with the consolidation of religious authority, however, Saint-Simon connected it with the rise of scientific and rational thought. In tune with the ideas in the earlier part of his letter to Redern, Saint-Simon thus went on to suggest that the "moral crisis" of contemporary societies would only be

[482] As Saint-Simon noted, Condorcet had himself alluded to this analogy at the start of his *Esquisse*, but, in his view, Condorcet had misunderstood its implications. "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 821.
[483] According to Bonald, society went through successive stages of "childhood, adolescence and virility," like individuals. Louis de Bonald, *Législation primitive, considérée dans les derniers temps par les seules lumières de la raison*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1802), 316-17.

resolved through "the organisation of the positive system." He also maintained that this worldwide project should be spearheaded by "Europeans," as they were the "moral" forefront of humanity and its "scientific avant-garde."[484] Although it lent weight to his model of improvement, however, the analogy between individual and collective faculties also implied that human knowledge would eventually decline and deteriorate. Saint-Simon recognised this possibility and, in the final remarks of his letter to Redern, he drew out its implications by drawing anew on physiological concepts. It was here that Saint-Simon would elaborate the principles of his early philosophy of history to their fullest extent.

As Saint-Simon went on to explain, individual human life was defined by what he called the "struggle between solids and fluids." In youth, the operations of "fluids" predominated, he argued, but as the human body grew older, it experienced increasing "solidification."[485] Although he provided no references to support these claims, they were inspired by contemporary principles of physiology, and broadly mapped on to the ideas developed by Cabanis in his lectures at the *Institut national*, under the Directory, and later published in *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*.[486] Unlike Cabanis, however, Saint-Simon proposed that the struggle between solids and fluids was not simply a feature of human physiology, but also of plant and mineral life. The Earth as a whole was subject to a process of "solidification," he claimed, and this meant that, over time, the planet would experience greater "aridification." This had significant implications, according to Saint-Simon, and it would eventually lead to the extinction of the human species, along with that of every other living creature on Earth.[487]

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[484] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 829-31.
[485] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 824.
[486] Cabanis, "De l'influence des âges sur les idées et sur les affections morales," 143-45, 153. On other contemporary uses of these concepts by physiologists, see Jean-Paul Frick, "Le concept d'organisation chez Saint-Simon" (Th. d'état, Univ. de Paris-Sorbonne, 1981), 145.
[487] Saint-Simon, "Lettres philosophiques et sentimentales," 824-25.

These curious yet prescient conjectures underscored the distinctive feature of Saint-Simon's early philosophy of history: it revived a cyclical theory of progress and decline. Although the analogy between individual and collective faculties pointed to the advent of humanity's rational capabilities in its mature stage of development, this was not the end of history. The emergence of the doctrine of physicism and of the moral leadership of the *savants* would in fact be followed by the subsequent deterioration of humanity's rational faculties, and this would itself be followed by the incremental degradation of the Earth's environmental conditions and, ultimately, by the demise of the human species itself. As Saint-Simon went on to describe in *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, these developments would culminate in the death of "the last man," who would pass way after having drunk "the last drop of water on the earth," along with the complete aridification of the planet, which would thus become uninhabitable. The end of history, following this account, was not commensurate with social peace and scientific advancement, but with human extinction.[488]

These ideas underscored the key tension in the vision of progress Saint-Simon articulated through his critique of Condorcet. Although he promoted the advent of new scientific doctrine, on the basis of the linear transition from one theory of first causes to another, he also refuted Condorcet's conception of perfectibility by reviving a cyclical philosophy of history. This tension reflected the motley and not always consistent argumentation that underlay Saint-Simon's early model of improvement. As I have argued, this model was shaped by Saint-Simon's original, if unusual, reinterpretation of the concepts of the Idéologues and of the Theocrats. Although this model was based on a series of claims about the nature of individual faculties and capacities, however, its emphasis was on the advent of a collective system of thought and the social domination of the *savants*. In articulating this model, Saint-Simon ultimately followed Bonald

[488] Saint-Simon, *Travail sur la gravitation universelle*, 1220-22, 1224-25. For a recent study of the discourse of human extinction in this period and thereafter, see Thomas Moynihan, *X-Risk: How Humanity Discovered Its Own Extinction* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2020).

who, in his own critique of the *Esquisse*, had argued that "it was not man who perfected society," but "society that perfected man."[489] The search for a science of society in France in this way shifted to a focus on the features and attributes of collective processes, or from perfectibility to progress.

The Golden Age of Humanity

Following the fall of Napoléon and the return of the Bourbons, Saint-Simon reworked his approach. Although he continued to emphasise the need for moral and intellectual unity, he no longer promoted the doctrine of physicism. Inspired by contemporary ideas of political economy, he now suggested that the stability and harmony of European societies required the growth of their productive capacities through the development of the division of labour, the freedom of industrial activities and the diffusion of knowledge. In the early 1820s, Saint-Simon came to argue that the advent of this new order required an alliance of three social classes: those who managed and were involved in economic activities, the "industrials"; those who studied the laws of nature and made scientific discoveries, the *savants*; and those responsible for stirring popular passions and sentiments, the artists.[490] In his final works, and in contrast to his early writings, Saint-Simon settled on the view that this order required the establishment of a regenerated Christianity, a social religion committed to universal fraternity and the improvement of the lives of the poor.[491]

This approach was based on different principles to Saint-Simon's early model of improvement. In place of a physiological justification of social hierarchy, Saint-Simon developed a theory of progress that centred on the substitution of the desire to dominate fellow human beings with the

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[489] [Bonald], "Observations sur un ouvrage posthume de Condorcet," in *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux dans la société civile*, 2 vols. (N.p., 1796), 2:512.
[490] Saint-Simon, "L'Organisateur" [1819-20], *OC*, 3:2195; *Du système industriel. Troisième partie* [1822], *OC*, 4:2765. For earlier configurations of this alliance, see *Prospectus. L'Industrie* [1816], *OC*, 2:1444-50, 1457-58, 1461; *L'Industrie. Tome troisième* [1817], *OC*, 2:1522, 1535.
[491] Saint-Simon, *Du système industriel. Première partie* [1821], *OC*, 3:2503, 2515; *Nouveau christianisme. Dialogues entre un conservateur et un novateur. Premier dialogue* [1825], *OC*, 4:3183-226.

desire to dominate nature through industry. Saint-Simon also now presented the history of human society as structured by the transition from "power" to "capacity" as the basis for individual functions and occupations, not the sequential development of successive theories of first causes. Crucially, he now maintained that this history would culminate in the regime he called the "industrial and scientific system." No longer wedded to a cyclical theory of progress and decline, Saint-Simon argued in his Restoration works that this system would constitute the final and definitive state of human society, and that it would realise "paradise on earth."[492] Reversing a commonplace idea, he insisted in *De la réorganisation de la société européenne* (1814), co-authored with his assistant Augustin Thierry, that "the golden age of humanity" was no longer "behind us," but in the future, and that its advent was a condition of the "perfection of the social order."[493]

Saint-Simon promoted this approach by developing a new understanding of the concept of civilisation. Although he had employed the concept in his early works, it had not been a central feature of his initial approach. Under the Restoration, Saint-Simon came to suggest that civilisation was the causal mechanism behind human progress, and that a proper understanding of this mechanism was the key to the stability, harmony and perfection of contemporary society. While he associated civilisation with the development of science and industry, he also described it as a providential law that was beyond human agency. This law could neither be controlled nor redirected, he claimed, and all individuals could do was to become aware of its purpose and to further its ends through their works. Saint-Simon thus replaced the series of claims about individual faculties and capacities that lay behind his earlier approach with a wholly collective model of improvement. This model was both based on an analysis of a general mechanism of

[492] Saint-Simon, *L'Organisateur*, 2195
[493] Saint-Simon, Thierry, *De la réorganisation de la société européenne*, 1297.

progress, the law of civilisation, as well as being oriented towards society-wide advancements in the form of the development and perfection of science, industry and, eventually, religion.

This new approach combined Condorcet's future-oriented philosophy of history with the institutional model of reform earlier devised by Sieyès. In his Restoration works, Saint-Simon nonetheless developed this model in dialogue with a set of thinkers who formed a group of liberal opposition to the Bourbon monarchy. Although these thinkers drew in various ways on Sieyès and Condorcet, they reworked the republican principles associated with those theorists, and they developed arguments for free trade and economic liberalisation that combined a commitment to individual rights with new historical justifications for the advent of industrial society.[494] Saint-Simon was closely associated with these reformers in the early years of the Restoration, but he developed a distinct approach to them. The law of civilisation, he argued, pointed to the ascendency of both industrial and scientific activities, to the replacement of government by administration and to the rise of a new moral doctrine based on the principles of common utility and social solidarity. In place of the liberal focus on reform through politics, Saint-Simon looked to the advent of a harmonious society without the need for traditional forms of authority or domination.

The Law of Civilisation

In his early works, Saint-Simon had employed the concept of civilisation in a general sense to describe the degree of advancement of human society. Under the Restoration, Saint-Simon developed his understanding of this concept, and it became a more central component of his model of social improvement. The growth of civilisation, he claimed in *L'Organisateur* (1819), was

[494] Shirley M. Gruner, "Political Historiography in Restoration France," *History and Theory* 8, no. 3 (1969): 346-65; Gareth Stedman-Jones, "Saint-Simon and the Liberal Origins of the Socialist Critique of Political Economy," in *La France et l'Angleterre au XIX^e siècle. Échanges, représentations, comparaisons*, eds. Sylvie Aprile and Fabrice Bensimon (Grâne: Créaphis, 2006), 21-47; David Todd, "Economists, Winegrowers and the Dissemination of Commercial Liberalism," chap. 2 in *Free Trade and Its Enemies in France, 1814-1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

the "superior law of progress of the human mind," and it drove and dominated "everything." This law was the causal mechanism behind the advancement of society and the perfection of human happiness, Saint-Simon insisted, and it was characterised by the progress of knowledge as well as by the application of this knowledge to the satisfaction of needs and desires – that is to say, by science and industry. While it derived from human works, however, Saint-Simon insisted that individuals could neither "influence" nor "control" the development of civilisation. This law, he suggested, was "our true providence," and the "great perfection" of contemporary society lay in its ability to knowingly follow this law, instead of being "blindly pushed by it."[495] For Saint-Simon, human progress was thus pre-ordained, but knowledge of the law of civilisation and its attributes would serve to bolster and further its development.

This approach followed the contemporary transformation of the concept of civilisation in French and European intellectual circles. As scholars have shown, this term had origins in Enlightenment ideas of progress, but it became more conceptually loaded as a signifier of European superiority in the nineteenth century.[496] Saint-Simon's approach nonetheless specifically resonated with the ideas of the theocratic thinker de Maistre. As Carolina Armenteros has shown, de Maistre developed an influential aetiology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in which history was conceived as the vehicle of divine Providence.[497] While de Maistre envisioned historical knowledge as a source of freedom, however, Saint-Simon insisted that civilisation compelled individuals to follow its direction. For Saint-Simon, modern

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[495] Saint-Simon, *L'Organisateur*, 2171-72.

[496] On the history of the term, see Jean Starobinski, "The Word *Civilization*," in *Blessings in Disguise; or, The Morality of Evil*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 1-36; Bertrand Binoche, "Civilisation: le mot, le scheme et le maître-mot," in *Les équivoques de la civilisation,* ed. Bertrand Binoche (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2005), 9-30; Antoine Lilti, "La civilisation est-elle européenne? Écrire l'histoire de l'Europe au XVIII[e] siècle," in *Penser l'Europe au XVIIIe siècle: Commerce, civilisation, empire*, eds. Antoine Lilti and Céline Spector (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2014), 139-66; Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009); Michael Sonenscher, "Barbarism and Civilisation," in *A Companion to Intellectual History*, eds. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 288-302. On its association with justifications of European imperialism, see Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

[497] De Maistre was later invoked by several of Saint-Simon's followers, including Comte and Enfantin, as a key inspiration. Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 284-89 (for the parallels with Saint-Simon's approach).

civilisation was also defined, not by the rise of Christianity, as de Maistre insisted, but by the advent of an "industrial spirit" concerned with economic production and exchange. This spirit had, he claimed, succeeded the "feudal spirit," which had itself been characterised by an "obsession with conquest" and a "passion to dominate."[498] Civilisation, according to Saint-Simon, thus pointed to the supersession of throne and altar, the traditional forms of authority upheld by de Maistre.[499]

In conceiving of civilisation in this way, Saint-Simon's approach had more affinities with the ideas of the Swiss thinker Benjamin Constant, an earlier ally of the Idéologues. As Constant argued in *De l'esprit de la conquête et de l'usurpation* (1814), originally conceived as a polemic against Napoléon, war and conquest were incompatible with the values of contemporary European society. "Modern nations," he argued, were concerned with "repose" and "comfort," and the source of their comfort was industry and commerce.[500] According to Constant, political leaders who continued to pursue war and conquest, as Napoléon had, contravened the essential orientation of modern society. Such policies were "anachronistic," he claimed, and inconsistent with the "present state of civilisation."[501] Building on Sieyès' ideas, Constant also maintained in a famous lecture at the Paris Athénée in 1819 that the emergence of commercial society was accompanied by the advent of a new type of liberty, unknown in the ancient world, concerned with "security in the enjoyment of private pleasures."[502] Protecting this form of liberty, he argued

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498 Saint-Simon, *L'Industrie. Tome quatrième* [1817], *OC*, 2:1583-84, 1597.
499 Saint-Simon associated de Maistre with what he called the "retrograde" school. *L'Industrie. Tome second* [1817], *OC*, 2:1489-90.
500 Benjamin Constant, *De l'esprit de la conquête et de l'usurpation* [1814], in *Écrits politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 129-132.
501 Constant, "De l'esprit de la conquête et de l'usurpation," 133. These arguments also dovetailed with the ideas developed by the comte de Montlosier in *De la Monarchie française* (1814). Gruner, "Political Historiography in Restoration France," 346-50.
502 Benjamin Constant, "De la liberté des anciens compare à celle des modernes," *Collection complète des ouvrages publiés sur le gouvernement représentatif et la Constitution actuelle, ou Cours de politique constitutionnelle*, vol. 4, pt. 7 (Paris, 1820), 253. On the influence of Sieyès, see Pasquale Pasquino, "Emmanuel Sieyès, Benjamin Constant et le "gouvernement des modernes." Contribution à l'histoire du concept de représentation politique," *Revue française de science politique* 37, no. 2 (1987): 214-29.

in this lecture, relied on the institutions of representative government and individual rights, or what would later come to be called "liberal democracy."[503]

In his Restoration works, Saint-Simon similarly maintained that nineteenth-century European society was essentially pacific. Like Constant, he argued that the march of civilisation pointed towards the replacement of military values with the principles of a commercial society – industriousness, reciprocity and utility.[504] Unlike Constant, however, and also *contra* Sieyès, Saint-Simon did not regard the institutions of representative government and individual rights as the guarantors of the stability and harmony of modern polities. Despite supporting the movement for liberal reform under the Bourbon Restoration, Saint-Simon conceived of those institutions as merely "transitional." Although he called, in one place, for the establishment of what he called "limited democracy" in France, "as it exists in England," he opposed the system of individual rights, which he described as "vague" and "imaginary" and presupposing a belief in God.[505] A parliamentary system of government was appropriate in present circumstances, he argued, and it should be "propagated" and "generalised," but only because it was the one that was best suited to give way to a new industrial order.[506]

This approach reflected Saint-Simon's distinct philosophy of history. Whereas Constant presented civilisation as culminating in modern principles of individual and political freedom, Saint-Simon argued that it was characterised by the "natural tendency" towards "self-improvement," which he defined as society's ability to better satisfy human needs and desires. As it was manifested in the course of history, he argued, the march of civilisation had seen the transition from "power" to "capacity" as the organising principle of European societies. This

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[503] On idea of "liberal democracy," which arose in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Helena Rosenblatt, "Caesarism and Liberal Democracy: Napoleon III, Lincoln, Gladstone, and Bismarck," chap. 5 in *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018).
[504] Saint-Simon, *L'Industrie. Tome second*, 1468, 1493, n. (b).
[505] Saint-Simon, "Note manuscrite addressee à Carnot, minister de l'intérieur" [MS, c. 1815], *OC*, 2:1387; Saint-Simon, *L'Industrie. Tome second*, 1483; "Des intérêts politiques de l'industrie" [MS, c. 1817], *OC*, 2:1688.
[506] Saint-Simon, *Prospectus. L'Industrie*, 1465; *L'Industrie. Tome troisième*, 1548-49, 1563-64.

transition originated in the 11th and 12th centuries, according to Saint-Simon, and it had involved the gradual move away from what he called the "feudal and theological system" and the attendant rise of scientific and industrial activities. Those activities were respectively concerned with the "study of nature" and the application of this study to "the satisfaction of needs and desires," he explained, and their development had engendered vast improvements in human happiness. Their growth also made possible a key transformation in the moral structure of society, for Saint-Simon: the substitution of a system based on the domination of humans, to one predicated on the domination of nature.[507]

According to Saint-Simon, the law of civilisation did not point to the advent of modern liberty; rather, it looked to the transformation and reconfiguration of the human desire to dominate:

> This love for domination, which is certainly indestructible in humans, has nevertheless been cancelled out in large part by the progress of civilisation, or at least its disadvantages have almost disappeared under the new system. Indeed, the development of action on nature has changed the direction of this sentiment by turning it towards objects. The desire to command humans has slowly transformed itself into the desire to make and remake nature at our will.[508]

The desire to dominate, which Saint-Simon had described in his early works as a "physiological fact," thus remained a central component of his understanding of human psychology. He now provided a different account of its role and implications in society, however. No longer linked to the domination of human beings, this desire did not imply that society needed to reconfigure its structures of authority and connect power with knowledge, as Saint-Simon had earlier proposed, or to reform the institutions of government, as Constant and other liberal reformers suggested. The development of civilisation, for Saint-Simon, would make it possible to do away with traditional forms of power and authority altogether. The new order that would realise this transformation was what he came to call the "industrial and scientific system," and it was this

[507] Saint-Simon, *L'Organisateur*, 2152-55, 2172-75.
[508] Saint-Simon, *L'Organisateur*, 2175, n. (a).

system, in his view, that would constitute the "truly final destination of the civilised human species."[509]

The Industrial and Scientific System

Saint-Simon outlined the principles of what he initially called the "industrial regime" or "industrial society" in his four-volume work *L'Industrie* (1816-18), composed with the help of Augustin Thierry. As Saint-Simon presented it in this work, the development of society's productive capacities would serve to further human well-being, as well as harmonise contemporary social relations. The satisfaction of needs and desires was the primary motivation behind human behaviour, he argued, and the purpose of society was therefore to optimise the ability for individuals to pursue this end through "useful works," production and trade.[510] These activities formed the essence of "industry," according to Saint-Simon, and their unimpeded development, which was also the basis "of all riches and of all wealth," would ensure the reconciliation of individual and collective interests.[511] Having initially defined the "industrial class" as those who owned and managed production, Saint-Simon came to conceive of this group as encompassing workers of all types, including those he termed the "proletarians."[512]

This approach followed the thrust of the political economy earlier developed by Sieyès and Smith, and it was inspired by the works of a group of thinkers who continued their ideas in the nineteenth century. The leading figure in this group was Jean-Baptiste Say, the Swiss political economist. In *Traité d'économie politique*, which first appeared in 1803 and was revised and republished in 1814, Say developed an influential account of modern economic practices and lauded the moral benefits of industriousness. Say suggested in this work that industriousness, if

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[509] Saint-Simon, *Du système industriel. Deuxième partie* [1821], *OC*, 3:2549.
[510] Saint-Simon, *L'Industrie. Tome second*, 1468-70. On the connections between this approach to social reform and Benthamite utilitarianism, see Michel Bellet, "On the Utilitarian Roots of Saint-Simonism: From Bentham to Saint-Simon," *History of Economic Ideas* 17, no. 2 (2009): 41-63.
[511] Saint-Simon, *Prospectus. L'Industrie*, 1444; *L'Industrie. Tome second*, 1498.
[512] Saint-Simon, "De l'organisation sociale, deuxième partie" [MS, c. 1817-1818], *OC*, 2:1720; "La classe des prolétaires" [MS, c. 1817-1818], *OC*, 2:1727-28.

properly aligned with other virtuous manners, such as independence, equality and frugality, could further the stability and harmony of contemporary society.[513] As previously mentioned, Say's work played a crucial role in shaping Destutt de Tracy's turn towards political economy in the early nineteenth century, and his ideas underpinned the theory of commercial society that appeared in the last instalment of Destutt de Tracy's work of *idéologie*, *Traité sur la volonté et ses effets* (1815). Under the Restoration, Say's political economy would also be championed by Charles Comte and Charles Dunoyer, the editors of the liberal journal *Le Censeur* (later, *Le Censeur européen*), who promoted the advent of a society organised around "industrial" principles, or what they came to call "industrialism."[514]

Saint-Simon had attended a course of lectures by Say in the early nineteenth century, and he extolled his *Traité d'économie politique*, calling it the *nec plus ultra* of modern political economy.[515] Building on his ideas, Saint-Simon argued that the advent of industrial principles would further the development of human civilisation. As he maintained in *L'Organisateur*, the rise of industrial society would consolidate the transition away from the feudal system and contribute to the emergence of new principles of social cohesion:

> In the old system, the people were *enlisted* by their leaders. In the new one, they *combine* with them. Military leaders issued *commands*. Industrial leaders only deliver *direction*. In the first case, the people were *subject*. In the second, they are *members*… In a society in which men have no capacity or stake whatever, there are necessarily masters and slaves… But a cooperative society in which all have a capacity and a stake is truly an association, and there is no other inequality than that of their capacity and stake… Each receives stature and profits proportional to their capacity and stake, and this constitutes the highest degree of equality that is possible and desirable. This is the fundamental character of industrial societies.[516]

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[513] Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1803). On Say's political economy, see Richard Whatmore, "The Political Economy of Jean-Baptiste Say's Republicanism," *History of Political Thought* 19, n. 3 (Autumn 1998): 439-56. On the development and reception of Say's ideas in the early years of the Restoration, see Whatmore, "Rejecting the Post-War Settlement," chap. 10 in *Republicanism and the French Revolution*.

[514] On "industrialism," Edgar Allix, "Jean-Baptiste Say et les origines de l'industrialisme," *Revue d'économie politique*, 24, no. 4 (1910): 303-13; no. 5 (1910): 341-63; Ephraïm Harpaz, *Le "Censeur," Le "Censeur Européen": Histoire d'un journal libéral et industrialiste* (Geneva: Slatkine, 2000).

[515] Saint-Simon, *L'Industrie. Tome second*, 1496-98; *L'Industrie. Tome quatrième*, 1636.

[516] Saint-Simon, *L'Organisateur*, 2187-88.

According to Saint-Simon, the advent of industrial society would see the replacement of command by direction, subjection by membership and domination by cooperation. While individuals would remain unequal in their capacities and "stakes," they would each receive benefits relative to their productive activities. Echoing Sieyès' earlier approach, Saint-Simon maintained that work would be the basis of social order in the industrial system, and the main source of instability, in contemporary society, was idleness.[517] He also argued that this new system would further common utility through the associative and harmonising principle of the division of labour.[518]

These views aligned with the political economy of Comte and Dunoyer. Saint-Simon nonetheless diverged from the other proponents of industrialism in several crucial respects.[519] Firstly, he argued that the development of industrial activity was contingent on the progress of knowledge, and that the scientific study of nature supported and furthered "the production of useful things." As Saint-Simon maintained in *L'Industrie*, those involved in scientific and industrial activities were engaged in distinct but complementary pursuits, and the associated development of these "capacities" would serve to promote "common utility." Revising his earlier approach, he also maintained that, in the final state of society, those two capacities would replace the forms of authority previously entrusted to "temporal" and "spiritual" powers in society.[520] In contrast to Comte and Dunoyer, Saint-Simon insisted that contemporary society should have as its common goal the pursuit of both industrial and scientific activities.

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[517] Saint-Simon, *L'Organisateur*, 2188. This was the basis for Saint-Simon's famous parable, which, evoking Sieyès' earlier conception of the Third Estate, he compared the effect of France losing its top layer of scientists, artists and artisans with that of losing its noble and richest classes. Saint-Simon, *L'Organisateur*, 2119-24.
[518] Saint-Simon, *Du système industriel. Première partie*, 2348, n. (a).
[519] On this divergence, see also Charles Dunoyer, "Esquisse historique des doctrines auxquelles on a donné le nom d'*Industrialisme*," *Revue encyclopédique ou Analyse et annonces raisonnées des productions les plus remarquables dans la littérature, les sciences et les arts* 33 (February 1827): 388-90.
[520] Saint-Simon, *Prospectus. L'Industrie*, 1461; *L'Industrie. Tome troisième*, 1528-30; *Du système industriel. Deuxième partie*, 2527.

Saint-Simon also maintained that the institution of the industrial and scientific system would see the replacement of much of the machinery of government by public administration. Once society was adequately organised to meet and further the satisfaction of human needs, he argued, there would no longer be "insurrections to be feared." The coercive power of government would therefore no longer be required, according to Saint-Simon, and it would be possible to abolish standing armies and reduce public expenditure on public policing.[521] While some of the proponents of industrialism envisaged that society might one day become self-regulating, Saint-Simon maintained that the new order would be directed by the three social classes with "high administrative capacity": the *savants*, the leaders of industry and artists. Those classes would not govern society in the traditional sense, he insisted. The first two would coordinate the "useful works" that needed to be carried out in collective interests, such as large-scale infrastructural projects, while the last would "impassion" society for the advent of the industrial and scientific system.[522] The conventional institutions of government would, meanwhile, be reduced to "maintaining public calm," and their limited scope would make it possible for individuals to enjoy "the greatest degree of liberty that was possible in society."[523]

Saint-Simon argued, finally, that the advent of the industrial and scientific system required the establishment of a uniform moral doctrine. While Comte and Dunoyer presumed that industrial society would eventuate from the combined development of individual self-interest and economic production, Saint-Simon maintained that it required a system of "common ideas." This was, he claimed, the "ABC of the science of societies."[524] In line with the approach developed in his early works, Saint-Simon initially called for the institution of a "positive" moral

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[521] Saint-Simon, "De l'organisation sociale. Fragments d'un ouvrage inédit," in *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles* [1824], *OC*, 4:3079-80.
[522] Saint-Simon, *L'Organisateur*, 2195; *Du système industriel. Troisième partie*, 2765-68. Those projects included bridges and roads, and Saint-Simon proposed that they would also be financed and managed by private capital. On this aspect of his thought, see Riccardo Soliani, "Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon: Hierarchical Socialism?" *History of Economic Ideas* 17, no. 2 (2009): 21-39. On those three classes as endowed with high administration capacity, see "De l'organisation sociale. Fragments d'un ouvrage inédit," 3079-80, 3084-85.
[523] Saint-Simon, "De l'organisation sociale. Fragments d'un ouvrage inédit," 3084-85; *L'Organisateur*, 2209-14.
[524] Saint-Simon, "L'Industrie. Tome troisième" 1517.

doctrine, centred on the principles of industry and common utility.[525] In the 1820s, he then came to argue that this doctrine should promote universal fraternity and solidarity and further the view that society's common goal should be the improvement of every class. Saint-Simon also came to suggest that this doctrine be conceived as a new Christianity and propagate the idea that "all classes in society, and all nations, would prosper" if they were organised in the interests of the poor.[526] Revising his earlier view, Saint-Simon rejected the virtues of self-interest and argued that a "new Christianity," or what he also called "definitive Christianity," uniting Catholics and Protestants, was the "only social doctrine" suited to European societies "in their present state of enlightenment and civilisation."[527]

This project resonated once again with the ideas of de Maistre, who similarly called in his works for a regenerated Christianity.[528] While de Maistre was a fierce proponent of ultramontanism, however, Saint-Simon conceived of his new Christianity primarily as a social religion, aligned with the principles of the industrial and scientific system.[529] As in his pre-Restoration works, Saint-Simon's vision of progress thus effected a synthesis of theocratic and non-theocratic approaches. Whereas he had previously sought to combine the ideas of the Theocrats with those of the Idéologues, he now sought to assimilate the former with those of liberal and industrialist reformers. The product of this original synthesis was a model of improvement that looked to the overhaul of traditional forms of power and authority and the reorganisation of society around the principles of capacity, industry and solidarity. Although Saint-Simon presented this development as the necessary outcome of the law of civilisation, he also argued that the advent of society's final and definitive state required the institution of a new moral doctrine. The nature

[525] Saint-Simon, *L'Industrie. Tome second*, 1497-99; *L'Industrie. Tome troisième*, 1574-77.
[526] Saint-Simon, *Nouveau christianisme* 3188.
[527] Saint-Simon, *Nouveau christianisme* 3223.
[528] As Armenteros describes it, Saint-Simon's *Nouveau Christianisme* "was astonishingly similar to [de Maistre's] *Du pape* in structure but radically different in content." Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 287.
[529] As he remarked in one place, the advent of the "industrial and scientific system" and of "definitive and complete Christianity" would amount to "the same thing." Saint-Simon, *Du système industriel. Deuxième partie*, 2573.

of this doctrine would be the source of the dispute between Comte and Saint-Simon, and the distinct positions they took on this subject pointed towards the different legacies of Saint-Simon's social philosophy in the nineteenth century.

Towards Positivism and Socialism

In his Restoration works, Saint-Simon maintained that the course of history was shaped by an inexorable law of civilisation, which, acting as a providential force, worked to further the improvement of human society. He nonetheless insisted that the emergence of society's final and definitive state also required a set of practical reforms. The advent of the "industrial and scientific system" was dictated by the "present state of civilisation," Saint-Simon argued in *Du système industriel* (1820-21), but it was held back because "an industrial and scientific opinion" had not yet taken hold in European societies, and those societies remained in a state of "ignorance and uncertainty."[530] As in his early works, Saint-Simon thus called for the elaboration of a uniform system of ideas to support and consolidate the reform of contemporary society. In contrast to his early works, he promoted the emergence of a system aligned with industrial principles, not the doctrine of physicism, and he called for an alliance of three social classes to further its advent, not the domination of the *savants*. In his final writings, Saint-Simon also proposed that this system should further principles of fraternity and solidarity and that it constitute itself as a new and definitive version of Christianity.

These ideas would contribute to the dispute between Comte and Saint-Simon. Comte, a talented young student who had attended the École polytechnique, had been Saint-Simon's assistant since 1817 and had played an important role in the articulation of Saint-Simon's ideas under the Restoration. He nonetheless gradually grew more independent, and he came to develop his own approach. In his first seminal work *Prospectus des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la*

[530] Saint-Simon, *Du système industriel. Deuxième partie*, 2527-28.

société (1822), he argued that civilisational progress principally required the elaboration of a "positive" system of knowledge, and it was the *savants* who should take the lead in the regeneration of modern society. Although this approach remained intellectually close to Saint-Simon's, it revived aspects of Saint-Simon's early model of improvement, and Saint-Simon criticised Comte for undervaluing the significance of both industrial activity and religious sentiments. This assessment, along with Saint-Simon's rigid assertion of editorial control over Comte's work, led to the break between the two thinkers in 1824.

Although the dispute between Comte and Saint-Simon is well documented, it brings to light the lines of contrast within and between Saint-Simon's different models of social improvement.[531] This dispute also revived, in a new form, the terms of earlier disagreements between the proponents of a science of society in France. Specifically, it evoked the varying positions taken by late eighteenth-century theorists on the importance of scientific leadership in society, on the priority of the perfection of knowledge versus the development of economic relations and, more generally, on whether social reforms pointed to the convergence or divergence of human capacities over time. In contrast to earlier theorists, however, Comte and Saint-Simon did not primarily disagree over the origins and character of individual faculties, but over the features and attributes of the law of civilisation and the collective activities best suited to consecrate its development. Their dispute, as I show below, would also feed into new and original conceptions of social science, and it would contribute to the divergent ideas of progress developed by Saint-Simon's followers.

Comte's Social Science

Around the same time Saint-Simon settled on his new model of social improvement, Comte began to develop his own approach to reform. In his *Prospectus*, initially circulated in 1822, and

[531] On the break between them, see Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993-2009), vol. 1 (1993), 231-39.

later revised and republished under the title *Plan des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société* (1824), Comte developed an approach that combined and adapted different elements of Saint-Simon's philosophy.[532] Like Saint-Simon, he argued that society should have as its goal the development of scientific and industrial activities, and that the social system that would eventuate would represent the culmination of the march of civilisation and stabilise and harmonise European societies. Comte also similarly insisted that this system would replace the theological and feudal order and replace the domination of men with the domination of nature. In line with Saint-Simon, he rejected the theory of individual rights, and he associated this theory with the "legal" and "metaphysical" stage of human history, which he described as a transitional step towards the final and definitive social state. Comte also claimed that, though it was prescribed by the "natural and constant law" of civilisation, the emergence of society's final state required concerted action on the part of different classes.[533]

Unlike Saint-Simon, Comte maintained that the advent of a new social order involved a hierarchy of tasks. In contrast to the model of improvement Saint-Simon developed under the Restoration, Comte insisted that this project required first and foremost the elaboration of an "organic" doctrine – capable of providing moral and intellectual unity to European society – by those endowed with the "greatest intellectual powers," the *savants*. This was the case, in his view, because civilisation was predicated on the separation of tasks, and "theory" always preceded "practice" in the realisation of human works. The *savants* should also be pre-eminent, according to Comte, because they already possessed the spirit of international cooperation needed to articulate a common doctrine, while the "industrials" were prone to what he called "savage patriotism." Although the march of civilisation pointed to a state in which the scientific and

[532] Comte's *Prospectus* (1822) was first intended to be included as part of a work in which Saint-Simon sough to outline of a new "social contract." A revised version of the work was published in two different editions in 1824, under its new title. On these different editions, see H. S. Jones, "Note on text and translation," in Comte, *Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xxix-xxxi.
[533] Comte, *Prospectus des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société*, in Saint-Simon, *Du contrat social* (Paris: Les marchands de nouveautés, 1822), 38, 44, 63-65, 75-76, 103, 127-133, 147-50.

industrial classes would respectively take on "spiritual" and "temporal" powers in society, he claimed, it was the members of the first who had to take the lead in developing the moral and intellectual framework that would further the realisation of this state.[534]

In addition to this, Comte insisted that the precondition for the elaboration of new moral doctrine was the development of a "positive" science of society, or what he called in his *Prospectus* "social physics." Building on the ideas in Saint-Simon's early works, he argued that the development of this science would represent the culmination of the history of progress of the human mind. He also suggested, in the first iteration of his famous law of three states, that this history was defined by the transition from a theological, to a metaphysical, to a positive system of knowledge, or from a system in which phenomena were explained by recourse to "supernatural ideas," to one that appealed to "personified abstractions," to one, finally, that was based on "general laws that were entirely of a positive order." Every branch of knowledge moved through these stages, according to Comte, and their unfolding saw the growing ascendency of reason over imagination and the differentiation of each area of study from one another. This last point was particularly important, in his view, and it was because earlier exponents of social science had failed to properly conceive of its epistemological specificity that this science had not yet attained a "positive" status.[535]

The science of society, Comte went on to suggest, was a historical science, and it should focus on examining the nature and characteristics of civilisation. Opposing Condorcet's earlier attempt to derive social science from mathematics, as well as Cabanis' efforts to draw on physiology, he argued that social physics should seek to establish the laws of "collective development of the human species." He claimed that it would in this way be in a position to ascertain the attributes

[534] Comte, *Prospectus*, 42-43, 49-50, 59-63, 65-66.
[535] Comte, *Prospectus*, 71-73, 88-89, 147-50.

of "the system that the march of civilisation is tending to produce today."[536] The elaboration of the science of society would also make it possible to replace and supersede the "critical" precepts that had undone the feudal and theological system, such as individual rights and popular sovereignty, and constitute the principles of a new "organic" doctrine, conducive to social harmony and moral cohesion.[537] While Comte suggested that artists would propagate this doctrine by appealing to popular passions and imagination, he envisioned the development of a "positive" social science, and of the doctrine that it entailed, as the primary and most important task in the contemporary project of reform and insisted that this task would call on the "combined forces of European *savants*."[538]

When the revised edition of Comte's essay appeared in 1824, Saint-Simon maintained that it was the best work "ever published on general politics." Comte, he nonetheless insisted, had attributed too great a significance to the authority of the *savants*. It was the "industrial capacity" that would be pre-eminent in the new social system, according to Saint-Simon, and industrial and scientific activities were of "equal utility" in its development. He also maintained that his "student" had only addressed the "scientific" dimension of this system and neglected its "sentimental and religious dimension."[539] As Saint-Simon described it, Comte's essay misconstrued the relationship between the activities that would further the establishment of society's final and definitive state and provided a one-side account of the features and attributes of this state. Although it built on different elements of his thought, Saint-Simon thus rejected Comte's attempted synthesis of his civilisational theory of progress with his earlier emphasis on

[536] Comte, *Prospectus*, 187-91. For his critique of Condorcet's social mathematics see *Prospectus*, 164-74; on Cabanis, see 175-87. In an earlier essay, Comte had also criticised Destutt de Tracy for seeking to derive social science from the science of ideas. Comte, "Considérations sur les tentatives qui ont été faites pour rendre positive la science sociale, en la faisant dériver d'une autre science" [1819], in *Écrits de jeunesse, 1816-1828*, eds. Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro and Pierre Arnaud (Paris: Mouton, 1970), 479-81.
[537] Comte, *Prospectus*, 15-16, 25-35.
[538] Comte, *Prospectus*, 70, 127-34.
[539] Saint-Simon, *Catéchisme des industriels* [1823-24], *OC*, 4:2976-77.

the leadership of the *savants*. Saint-Simon's public disavowal of Comte's work was a humiliation to his one-time associate, and it spurred the separation between the two thinkers.

Horizons, Old and New

The dispute between Comte and Saint-Simon serves to illuminate important changes and continuities in the models of improvement at the heart of early French social science. Comte, in his *Prospectus*, gave priority to the articulation of a "positive" system of knowledge, as well as to the moral and intellectual pre-eminence of the *savants* in the regeneration of contemporary society. This approach chimed not only with the ideas in Saint-Simon's early works, but also with Condorcet's emphasis on the importance of the perfection of knowledge as well as with Destutt de Tracy's technocratic vision of reform. Comte nonetheless predicated his approach not on the concept of perfectibility, or on an analysis of individual faculties, but on the separation of collective tasks that impelled the progress of society and the three-stage law behind the historical development of knowledge. Saint-Simon, for his part, emphasised the importance of industrial activity, thus evoking Sieyès' earlier approach, and he also pointed to the role of sentiments in the moral constitution of society, in a way that resonated with Cabanis' science of man. Like Comte, however, Saint-Simon's views reflected his assessment of the social forces at play in the historical development of civilisation, not an analysis of individual human faculties.

The dispute between Comte and Saint-Simon thus illustrates the transition from individual to collective models of improvement in the search for a science of society in France. This transition involved the move away from arguments over the nature of human perfectibility, of the faculties of individual mind and body and of the individual capacity for moral conduct, innate or acquired. It also saw a greater emphasis on the features and attributes of the pre-determined march of civilisation, of the moral and intellectual unity of society and of the collective modes of activity that shaped social life. This transition paved the way for the different models of social improvement developed by Saint-Simon's followers in the nineteenth century. The ideas Comte

outlined in his *Prospectus* would form the basis of the more fully-fledged positivist philosophy he later articulated in a series of influential texts in the 1830s, while Saint-Simon's other followers would revise and adapt Comte and Saint-Simon's approaches in their works, from the mid-1820s onwards. Building on the dispute between Comte and Saint-Simon, those thinkers would variously give priority to science, industry, religion, or some combination of all three, in their own visions of progress.

As I show in the next chapter, one of the first points of contention between Saint-Simon's followers would lie in the proper principles of a "positive" social science. For Comte, this science had to be epistemologically distinct from other branches of knowledge, and from physiology in particular. Some of Saint-Simon's other followers, however, would see physiology and social science as interlinked and suggest that analysis of the human body should inform the study of social organisation. They did so in ways that looked back not only to ideas of thinkers like Cabanis, or to Saint-Simon's early thought, but also to some of the arguments in Saint-Simon's final works, in which he renewed an appeal to physiological concepts. Like in his pre-Restoration works, Saint-Simon drew on those concepts to bolster his vision of progress. Unlike in his early works, his use of them pointed to two different ways of conceiving of the perfection of the social order. This distinction, which has been clarified by the exclusion in the recent edition of his works of one of the texts usually attributed to him, is a significant aspect of his later thought, and it helps to explain its multiple, if conflicting, legacies.

It is worth emphasising that Saint-Simon's renewed appeal to physiology did not involve a return to the individualist approaches of late eighteenth-century social science, nor did it revive, in the same way, his earlier analogy between the development of individual and collective faculties. In his later works, Saint-Simon drew on physiological principles and concepts to further a project of reform that was concerned with the organisation and ends of the social whole. He was not especially focused on the development of individual faculties of mind and body, as Cabanis, for

instance, had been, and he did not develop a series of detailed analyses of the operations of either sensibility or of the human intellect, as had had in his pre-Restoration works. The defining feature of Saint-Simon's later thought was his focus on the need to follow the pre-determined injunctions of the law of civilisation, conceived as the providential driver of social improvement. This remained the normative principle behind the vision of progress Saint-Simon developed in his final works, even as he sought, once again, to align his science of society with the science of physiology.

From Equality to Organicism?

According to one of the prevailing scholarly views, Saint-Simon was the proponent of an "organic" social theory, and he described society as operating in a similar way to a living organism. In line with this interpretation, Keith Baker suggested that – partly inspired by theocratic thinkers like Bonald, and partly by physiologists like Xavier Bichat – Saint-Simon conceived of society as a "living organic whole," and he envisioned social order as the outcome, not of rational choice or individual freedom, but of the proper distribution of a hierarchy of functions. Saint-Simon, Baker contends, also developed a philosophy of history organised around the "the powerful dialectic of critical and organic periods," or periods that were defined by social tension and antagonism and ones characterised by stability and harmony. In this way, Saint-Simon's approach moved away from the "individualist and egalitarian assumptions" of eighteenth social science, according to Baker, and his ideas shaped Comte's concern with the "organic unity of society," that is, with a form of organisation structured by "principles of hierarchy and subordination."[540] To borrow from Frank Manuel, whose claims underpinned

[540] Baker, "Closing the French Revolution, 329-31, 333, 336-37.

Baker's interpretation, Saint-Simon thus consecrated the transition "from equality to organicism" in French social thought at the turn of the nineteenth century.[541]

Although this interpretation has considerable merit, it needs to be revised in several respects. The text which Baker and others typically cite to suggest that Saint-Simon conceived of society as an organism was, in fact, composed by Étienne Bailly, a medical doctor and student of Gall.[542] Although Saint-Simon appealed to the analogy between individual and collective development in his early works, this analogy was not as prominent in his later thought.[543] Saint-Simon also did not propose a strict distinction between "critical" and "organic" periods of history, as is often assumed. Having differentiated between analytical and synthetic reasoning in early writings, he called, in various places, for the substitution of the eighteenth-century's critical spirit with a new "organising" social system.[544] The distinction between "critical" and "organic" periods, which was inspired by Comte's approach, was only solidified by Saint-Simon's followers in the late 1820s.[545] While Saint-Simon drew on Bichat's physiology in his later works in a way that could be said to advance an "organicist" social philosophy, he also promoted a hygienic model of improvement which, evoking Cabanis' earlier approach, pointed to the levelling of economic and

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[541] Manuel, "From Equality to Organicism." For other similar interpretations, see Blanckaert, *La nature de la société*, 18-19; Welch, "Social Science from the French Revolution to Positivism," 187; Bourdeau, "Nature et pensée sociale au XIX^e^ siècle," 82-84. For a different approach, see Musso, *Télécommunications et philosophie des reseaux*.

[542] This text is the first part of the two-part essay originally published under the title "De la physiologie appliquée à l'amélioration des institutions sociales" (1825). The first part, by Bailly, included a range of organicist metaphors, such as the analogy of society as "a living machine"; the second part, by Saint-Simon, was devoid of such metaphors. The misattribution of Bailly's part of the essay to Saint-Simon is widespread. This is partly the product of its inclusion in the selected edition of works published under the heading *La physiologie sociale*, by Georges Gurvitch (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965), where it is also mistakenly dated 1813. For clarification on the authorship of the text, see the editors' notes in Saint-Simon, *OC*, 4:3029-34. For Bailly's original work, see [Étienne Bailly], "De la physiologie appliquée à l'amélioration des institutions sociales," in *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles* (Paris, 1825 [1824]), 228-31.

[543] For uses of this analogy in his later works, see, however, *Catéchisme des industriels*, 2979-81; "De l'organisation sociale. Fragments d'un ouvrage inédit," 3068-71.

[544] See, for instance, the declaration in *De la réorganisation de la société européenne* (p. 1247): "La philosophie du siècle dernier a été révolutionnaire; celle du XIX^e^ siècle doit être organisatrice."

[545] John C. Eckalbar, "The Saint-Simonian Philosophy of History: A Note," *History and Theory* 16, no. 1 (1977): 40-4; François-André Isambert, "Époques critiques et époques organiques: une contribution de Buchez à l'élaboration de la théorie sociale des saint-simoniens," *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* 27 (1959): 131-52.

social conditions. These different elements of Saint-Simon's thought need to be distinguished, as they would shape the approaches of his followers.

Although he did not appeal to physiological ideas in his initial works under the Restoration, in the early 1820s Saint-Simon turned to Bichat's physiology to promote the necessary differentiation of activities and occupations in society. With reference to Bichat, he argued in the first part of *Du système industriel* (1820) that the "separation and combination of works" in society reflected a "law of human organisation," according to which the "different capacities" of the human mind were "mutually exclusive."[546] This view built on the claim, put forward in Bichat's *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* (1800), that individuals were endowed with a "limited amount" of vital energy. When this energy was directed towards a particular set of organs, Bichat suggested, it necessarily "diminished" in others, and this explained why individuals tended to perfect activities in which either the "senses," the "brain" or "locomotor muscles" predominated, and why they could not excel at all of them at once.[547] Drawing on these ideas, Saint-Simon argued that there was a distinction between those who possessed "practical" and "theoretical" capacities, and that this distinction justified the separation of tasks between the industrial and scientific classes in the development of a new social order.

By making use of Bichat's ideas in this way, Saint-Simon implied that society should be organised around the divergent and unequal set of abilities with which different social groups were endowed. This aligned with the view, diffused throughout his Restoration works, that the advent of the industrial and scientific system would see a move away from traditional forms of power and authority, and the attendant reconfiguration of society around the principle of capacity. It also lent weight to the idea, shared by Comte and Saint-Simon, that certain groups should take a

[546] Saint-Simon, *Du système industriel. Première partie*, 2483.
[547] According to Bichat, individual capacities were not naturally pre-determined, however, and they were large part due to the "remarkable influence" of society, which "nearly constantly endows certain external organs with a perfection that is not natural to them, and which distinguishes them especially from others." Xavier Bichat, *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* (Paris, an VIII [1800]), 152-63.

leading role in the project of social reform, as well as in the new order that would eventuate. While Comte gave priority to the *savants*, however, Saint-Simon promoted the view that three different classes should take on a leadership role in this project – the *savants*, the "industrials" and artists. These groups, as Baker and others have noted, mapped onto the three human types described by Bichat. In so far as this analogy sustained Saint-Simon's approach, he could therefore be said to have promoted an "organicist" conception of society, or one, as Manuel suggested, that looked to the "harmonious association or cooperation of men fundamentally dissimilar in their most essential natures."[548]

In a less well-known set of claims, Saint-Simon also turned to physiology in his later works to promote the equalisation of social and economic conditions. In a set of articles in *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles* (1824), Saint-Simon called on reformers to develop a system of "general physiology" devoted to the "moral and physical improvement" of society in general, and of the class of the poor in particular. Reviving Cabanis' earlier approach, he argued that contemporary physicians should bring together the study of "moral" and "physical" man and outline, "in the form of a hygienic prescription [*sous la forme d'ordonnance hygiènique*]," the system best suited to society's "present state of enlightenment and civilisation."[549] It was on the basis of these ideas that he called for a set of reforms targeting the general improvement of society. These included making work available "to all able-bodied men," the dissemination of "positive knowledge" among "the class of proletarians" and the development, in this class, of the "pleasures and enjoyments" required "to improve their minds." Although Saint-Simon presented these reforms as aligned with the leadership of those endowed with the highest capacities of

[548] Manuel, "From Equality to Organicism," 65.
[549] Saint-Simon, "De la physiologie appliquée à l'amélioration des institutions sociales," in *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles* [1824], *OC*, 4:3114.

administration, he also argued that they would further "the growth of equality" and the "levelling" of individuals in society.[550]

In contrast to his use of Bichat's physiology, this hygienic approach to social reform pointed to the convergence of individual capacities in society, rather than the consolidation of human divergence. In tune with Cabanis' ideas, Saint-Simon outlined a set of reforms that would mitigate, to a certain extent, existing "moral" and "physical" differences between individuals. In contrast to Cabanis, Saint-Simon did not conceive of those reforms as a means of promoting human perfectibility, nor did he propose the elaboration of personalised "life plans" attuned to individual circumstances. His concern was the perfection of the social whole. Saint-Simon nonetheless conceived of this perfection in two different ways: one of these was the "organic" ideal of a society structured by functional differentiation, the inequality of capacities and the leadership of certain pre-eminent social classes; the other was the ideal of a society of workers, all similarly educated and equally capable of meeting their needs and pursuing their pleasures. These two potentially contradictory conceptions co-existed in Saint-Simon's later works, yet they were each, in different ways, developed by appealing to physiological principles and concepts.

Saint-Simon's new Christianity, the final iteration of his project of reform, can be understood as an attempt to combine and harmonise those two conceptions. As he presented it in his last work, *Nouveau christianisme* (1825), this religion would further the emergence of a social system that would substitute "the aristocracy of talents," for the "aristocracy of birth."[551] Saint-Simon suggested that a new Christianity would nonetheless also promote the principle of universal brotherhood, or the view that "all men" should "treat each other as brothers," and it would call on society to improve "the moral and physical existence" of the poor.[552] The doctrine of this

[550] Saint-Simon, "De l'organisation sociale. Fragments d'un ouvrage inédit," 3078-79, 3082; "De la physiologie," 3103.
[551] Saint-Simon, *Nouveau christianisme* 3221.
[552] Saint-Simon, *Nouveau christianisme* 3185-87.

religion, he argued, would emphasise the common interests of all classes in society, and it would propagate the view that the groups endowed with higher capacities of administration (the artists, the *savants* and the heads of industry) "belonged to the class of workers." It would also present those groups, however, as society's "natural leaders."[553] Saint-Simon's new Christianity would, in other words, seek to foster social harmony by balancing the natural divergence of capacities with a moral doctrine predicated on the convergence and uniformity of human interests. All members of society, for Saint-Simon, would thus work towards the interests of the greater whole.

This vision of moral regeneration would inspire related, but distinct strands of thought after Saint-Simon. In the mid-1820s, one of Saint-Simon's followers, Philippe Buchez, would promote the elaboration of a new doctrine consecrating the "cults" of science and industry, but would hold back from calling for a new Christianity. The leaders of the Saint-Simonian movement would, meanwhile, institute a new religion advancing the cause of workers and women, a social group Saint-Simon ignored in his works.[554] They would, however, give priority to "organic" principles of functional differentiation and hierarchy, rather than the levelling of social and economic conditions. A range of early socialists, finally, developed projects of reform concerned with both spiritual renewal and the emancipation of the working classes. They would nonetheless move away from Saint-Simon's social physiology and embed their projects in broader models of natural history. Although some of them revived late eighteenth-century moral and political ideals, they all put a strong emphasis on the collective levers of social improvement. They thus extended Saint-Simon's repudiation of the revolutionary discourse of perfectibility, and they sought to construct visions of the future based on general, if not universal, principles of progress.

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[553] Saint-Simon, *Nouveau christianisme* 3220.

[554] Saint-Simon mentioned that women would be allowed to participate in the scientific council he proposed in *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*, but subsequently made no reference to them in his writings.

5 – Positivism and Early Socialism: The Forgotten Histories

The first half of the nineteenth century was a crucial period in the emergence of new ideas of progress. The French Revolution and its aftermath inspired a fresh historical consciousness across European societies, and many hoped to a greater extent than ever before to further improvements in their lives, by way of science, technology and politics. This was also a time of renewed imperialism, and, despite the persistence of universalist ideals, European conquest was increasingly justified by appealing to morally charged and racialised notions of civilisation.[555] This contributed to the reconfiguration of French social science. Revising liberal approaches, some sought to articulate forms of "social" political economy focused on the alleviation of the conditions of the poor.[556] Others, inspired by the critique of industrial civilisation of the idiosyncratic thinker Charles Fourier, promoted new versions of *la science sociale* that looked to the emancipation of both workers and women.[557] Charting a mid-way between those approaches, the followers of Saint-Simon continued the project of a science of society aligned with the ideal of progress, but which, following contemporary trends, gave greater attention to the plight of the disenfranchised, or what came to be known as the "social question."[558]

The death of Saint-Simon, in May 1825, thus marked a new phase in the search for a science of society in France. Shortly after his passing, a small group of associates, including Comte, launched the periodical *Le Producteur* (1825-26) with the aim of promoting and developing his

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[555] Jennifer Pitts, "Ideas of Empire: Civilization, Race, and Global Hierarchy," in *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, vol. 1, *The Nineteenth Century*, eds. Warren Breckman and Peter E. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 447-69; Naomi J. Andrews, ""The Universal Alliance of All Peoples": Romantic Socialists, the Human Family, and the Defense of Empire during the July Monarchy, 1830–1848," *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 473-502.

[556] On this strand of thought, see Giovanna Procacci, *Gouverner la misère: la question sociale en France (1789-1848)* (Paris: Seuil, 1993); Danièle Demoustier and Damien Rousselière, "Social Economy as Social Science and Practice: Historical Perspectives on France," in *Ethics and the Market: Insights from Social Economics*, eds. Betsy Jane Clary, Wilfred Dolfsma and Deborah M. Figart (London: Routledge, 2006), 112-25.

[557] On Fourier and his followers, see Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986); *Victor Considerant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). See also Pierre Mercklé, "La "science sociale" de Charles Fourier," *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 15, n. 2 (2006), 69-88; Rignol, *Les hiéroglyphes de la nature.*

[558] Holly Case, "The 'Social Question,' 1820-1920," *Modern Intellectual History* 13, no. 3 (2016): 747-75.

ideas. Having not yet absorbed Saint-Simon's last work, *Nouveau christianisme*, his followers focused on elaborating the "positive" principles of the industrial and scientific system and applied those principles to a range of considerations. In the late 1820s, the leaders of the Saint-Simonian movement then constituted themselves as a "church," with initiation rites, public ceremonies and a priestly hierarchy. The July Revolution of 1830, and the freedoms that it brought, made it possible for the Saint-Simonians to gain public prominence and attract a growing number of followers.[559] Consumed by internal disputes, they soon splintered, however, and several of them went on to form their own groups and associations. Free from Saint-Simonian doxa, those groups would contribute to the emergence of early French socialism, and they would help to inspire the radical movement of ideas that developed in France, and in Europe more generally, in the lead up to the revolutions of 1848.

Two major strands of thought grew out of the Saint-Simonian movement in the first half of the nineteenth century: positivism and early socialism. These were both shaped by competing and contested ideas of progress. The first centred on the project of constructing a "positive" science of society grounded in an understanding of the pre-determined pattern of development, or laws, of civilisation. Although Comte formulated the most influential, and best known, account of such a science, he was only one of several theorists to pursue this project in the 1820s, and others, such as the medical thinker Philippe Buchez and the lawyer Pierre-Isidore Rouen, promoted strands of "positive" social science resting on different conceptions of progress. The second strand of thought, early socialism, revived some of the moral and political ideals of the French Revolution, but, as it came to be developed under the July Monarchy, it was typically associated with religious projects of spiritual renewal as well as elaborate and fantastical cosmologies of progress. Two of the theorists who formulated the most developed versions of

[559] On the Saint-Simonians, see Antoine Picon, *Les saint-simoniens. Raison, imaginaire, utopie* (Paris: Belin, 2002); Pamela Pilbeam, *Saint-Simonians in Nineteenth-Century France: From Free Love to Algeria* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

such cosmologies were Buchez, after having split from the Saint-Simonians, and Pierre Leroux, also once a follower of Saint-Simon. They did so, however, by appealing to competing theories of natural science.

This chapter explores these legacies of Saint-Simon's thought, and it investigates the different philosophies of progress that were associated with the search for a science of society in the later years of the Restoration and in the 1830s and 1840s. In doing so, it illuminates continuities and differences in the models of social improvement that shaped this search. In an immediate way, the philosophies examined in this chapter continued the themes of the earlier dispute between Comte and Saint-Simon, and they were shaped by distinct and contrasting positions on whether science, industry or religion were the primary levers of progress. From a broader perspective, Saint-Simon's followers also extended the long-running debates of early French social science, and they developed different views on the relationship between the development of knowledge, the cultivation of morality and the perfection of economic society, whether to promote the freedom of mind or the submission to pre-established moral dictates and whether to further the convergence or divergence of human capacities in society. Although some of these thinkers appealed afresh to the concept of perfectibility, unlike late eighteenth-century theorists they were principally preoccupied with an analysis of the features and attributes of the collective processes behind social improvement.

The proponents of early socialism examined in this chapter did, however, effect a significant break with the approaches discussed in the previous chapter. As I argued, Comte and Saint-Simon opposed the principles of rights and equality of the French Revolution, and they claimed that the final state of society would supersede traditional forms of political authority. Early socialists, in contrast, revived aspects of the programme of reform of thinkers like Sieyès and Condorcet, and they variously promoted the advent of individual rights, representative government and a republican constitution. Inspired by Fourier, they typically did so, however, on

the back of all-encompassing philosophies of history in which human society was taken to gradually advance to higher planes of "association" and where progress was conceived as the inexorable driver of the development of individual and collective life, if not of the cosmos itself. In contrast to the secular approaches of the late eighteenth century, early socialists often propounded spiritual visions of moral regeneration and, drawing on Saint-Simon's later works, they looked to the advent of either a new religion or a regenerated Christianity to further the stability and harmony of contemporary society.

Some of the thinkers discussed in this chapter have been the subject of detailed scholarly study. Comte's ideas and their legacy, in particular, have been the focus of many works of historical erudition.[560] Others, in contrast, have been relatively neglected, if not forgotten. This chapter seeks to redress this neglect, and it does so by elucidating the range and variety of the philosophies of progress at the heart of positivist and early socialist thought. Although a number of studies have charted the origins and development of French positivism, none have examined the non-Comtian attempts to forge a "positive" social science after Saint-Simon. Similarly, while a number of scholars have examined Leroux's philosophy, there is only one recent study of the works of Buchez, despite the prominent role they played in shaping the emergence of Christian socialism in nineteenth-century France.[561] By examining the discussions and debates that took place between these thinkers, this chapter provides a better understanding of the intellectual background behind the emergence of positivism and early socialism.[562] It also supplies new vistas

[560] The reference study on Comte is Mary Pickering's three-volume biography. For a recent study of the international reception of positivist philosophy, see Johannes Feichtinger, Franz L. Fillafer and Jan Surnam, eds., *The Worlds of Positivism: A Global Intellectual History, 1770–1930* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). On Comte, see also Michel Bourdeau, Mary Pickering and Warren Schmaus, eds., *Love, Order, and Progress: The Science, Philosophy and Politics of Auguste Comte* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017).

[561] Along with many articles, studies on Leroux's philosophy include Armelle Le Bras-Chopard, *De l'égalité dans la différence: Le socialisme de Pierre Leroux* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1986); Vincent Peillon, *Pierre Leroux et le socialisme républicain: une tradition philosophique* (Latresne : Bord de l'Eau, 2003); Lucie Rey, *Les enjeux de l'histoire de la philosophie en France au 19e siècle: Pierre Leroux contre Victor Cousin* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012). On Buchez's thought, see Marie Lauricella, "Une république d'associés. Histoire et analyse de la doctrine buchézienne (1825-1863)" (PhD diss., Lyon, 2016).

[562] On early French socialism, see Charlton, *Secular Religions in France, 1815-1870*: Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France*; Pamela M. Pilbeam, *French Socialists before Marx. Workers, Women and the Social Question in France*

into the multiple iterations, configurations and legacies of the visions of progress at the heart of the search for a science of society in France in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first examines the different strands of positivism that were developed in the issues of *Le Producteur*, and it successively analyses the approaches advanced by Comte, Buchez and Rouen. I show that these theorists articulated three versions of a "positive" science of society and that they each developed, in different ways, Saint-Simon's collective model of improvement. While Comte reiterated and extended the principles outlined in his *Prospectus des travaux nécessaires pour réorganiser la société* (1822), Buchez promoted the development of a social science based on physiological principles and Rouen put forward an anti-individualist account of social cohesion. Each of these approaches, I contend, had important legacies. The second part of the chapter turns to the cosmologies of progress developed by Leroux and Buchez under the July Monarchy. I present these cosmologies as responses to the philosophies of Fourier and the Saint-Simonians, but I also emphasise their divergence from those thinkers. Investigating Leroux and Buchez's ideas in turn, I show the ways in which they drew on distinct theories of natural science to bolster their respective conceptions of moral regeneration. In doing so, the second part of this chapter thus details the contested relationship between science, religion and politics in early French socialist thought.

Three Strands of Positivism

Although it was short-lived, the journal *Le Producteur* was the crucible of Saint-Simonian thought. It was also the site of several different attempts to construct a "positive" science of society after Saint-Simon. In the prospectus of the journal, Léon Halévy, Saint-Simon's last secretary, followed the predications of his late master and maintained that, while it was defined by "a

(Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); "Dream Worlds? Religion and the Early Socialists in France," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 2 (2000): 499-515; Gareth Stedman-Jones, "European Socialism from the 1790s to the 1890s," in *Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, 1:196-231; Ludovic Frobert, *Vers l'égalité ou au-delà? Essai sur l'aube du socialisme* (Paris: ENS Editions, 2018).

general tendency towards pacific works and ideas of order, economy and public good," contemporary society found itself in a "state of crisis." This was the case, he explained, because society lacked a "frank and positive doctrine" that could "rally minds" and provide a common purpose to scientific, industrial and artistic activities – the "three great powers," he claimed, "of modern times." The purpose of *Le Producteur*, as Halévy presented it, would be to develop and diffuse the principles of this doctrine, and in this way provide "a stable basis" to contemporary society.[563] Three different conceptions of this doctrine would nonetheless be developed in the journal, and these would be based on three different versions of a "positive" social science and three distinct philosophies of progress.

Although he had recently broken with Saint-Simon, Comte looked to establish himself as the pre-eminent interpreter of his thought, and he published a series of essays in *Le Producteur* in which he developed the ideas of his earlier work.[564] Reiterating his three-stage law of progress, he argued that social stability and harmony required the elaboration of a "positive" social science, separate from other sciences. Now drawing explicitly on the ideas of the Theocrat Joseph de Maistre, Comte also called for the "spiritual" leadership of the *savants* in society and for submission to the doctrine they elaborated. Buchez, in contrast, argued that human civilisation oscillated between periods of synthesis and analysis and insisted that a "positive" science of society had to be derived from physiology. He also promoted the diffusion of a moral doctrine that valued both science and industry, and he called for lessening social inequalities through hygienic reform. Rouen, finally, followed Comte's conception of social science, but he argued that history alternated between more individualistic and more collectively oriented periods.

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563 [Léon Halévy], "Prospectus," *Le Producteur* 1 (1825): 3-15. On *Le Producteur*, see Philippe Régnier, "Les premiers journaux saint-simoniens ou l'invention conjointe du journal militant et du socialisme. *Le Producteur* d'Enfantin et Rodrigues et *L'Organisateur* de Laurent et Bazard," in *Quand les socialistes inventaient l'avenir. Presse, théories et expériences, 1825-1860*, eds. Thomas Bouchet, Vincent Bourdeau, Edward Castleton, Ludovic Frobert and François Jarrige (Paris: La Découverte, 2015), 37-48.

564 On his relationship with the Saint-Simonians, see Mary Pickering, "Comte and the Saint-Simonians," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 211-36.

Although he combined elements of Comte and Buchez's approaches, he outlined an original vision of progress based on a critique of *individualisme* (a term he coined), and he promoted a set of reforms that would further the advent of social and economic equality.

Comte, Buchez and Rouen all looked to advance the stability and harmony of contemporary society through the advent of a "positive" social science. They also each conceived of the principles of this science on the basis of an analysis of the pre-determined pattern of development of knowledge, society and civilisation, and thus built on the model of social improvement advanced by Saint-Simon in his Restoration works. They described the relationship between individual and collective improvement in different ways, however, and they problematised this relationship in a way that looked back to the prior dispute between Comte and Saint-Simon. Buchez's interest in hygienic reform also resonated with the earlier ideas of Cabanis, while Rouen's concern with economic reform evoked the concerns at the heart of Sieyès' social science. While Comte, Buchez and Rouen all emphasised the importance of public education, however, they also promoted the diffusion of a uniform system of ideas and belief that drew inspiration from religious forms of moral authority, an approach that famously drew criticism from Benjamin Constant.[565] In contrast to late eighteenth-century theorists, they continued Saint-Simon's project, inspired by the Theocrats, of furthering cohesion in society through the unity of moral and intellectual conceptions.

The distinct and contrasting approaches developed by Comte, Buchez and Rouen bring to light the variety of positivist thought in France in the early nineteenth century. They also pointed to its multiple, if not always remembered, legacies. As is well known, Comte's approach paved the way for the diffusion of "positive" scientific principles in the nineteenth century, while his emphasis on the epistemological specificity of "social physics" (or what he later called *sociologie*)

[565] Constant accused the contributors to *Le Producteur* of promoting the advent of "an industrial papacy." Helena Rosenblatt, "Re-evaluating Benjamin Constant's Liberalism: Industrialism, Saint-Simonianism and the Restoration Years," *History of European Ideas* 30, no. 1 (2004), 34-35.

would contribute to the emergence of this discipline as a distinct branch of knowledge. Although less well documented, Buchez's "social physiology" would shape the philosophy of the Saint-Simonians in the 1820s, and it would inform the cosmology of progress he developed under the July Monarchy. Finally, despite his relative obscurity, Rouen's ideas would be similarly influential in the development of Saint-Simonian thought. They would also play an important role in the emergence of the concept of socialism. Though now forgotten, *Le Producteur* served as a laboratory of ideas in the articulation of both Comtian and non-Comtian strands of positivist thought in France, and its contributors thus shaped, in more ways than one, the search for a science of society in the later years of the Restoration.

Comte's Restated Social Physics

Comte authored two sets of essays in *Le Producteur*, and he reaffirmed the need to elaborate a common moral doctrine to stabilise and harmonise contemporary European society.[566] Although these essays restated the principles of Comte's *Prospectus des travaux nécessaires pour réorganiser la société* (1822), they also elaborated his vision of moral and intellectual reform in several ways. "Modern civilisation," he maintained in "Considérations sur le pouvoir spirituel," was associated with the growth of industrial and productive activity, and one of its key features, he now argued more emphatically, was the development of the division of labour. This development contributed to the "better distribution of work," according to Comte, and it was the source of "all real progress" and "the general cause of human improvement." While industrial activity promoted more peaceful relations between people, however, Comte maintained that the division of labour also contributed to the "deterioration and dissolution" of social bonds. Echoing the earlier remarks of Smith and Condorcet, he argued that, left unchecked, occupational

[566] Auguste Comte, "Philosophical Considerations on the Sciences and Scientists" and "Considerations on the Spiritual Power," in *Early Political Writings*; originally published as "Considérations philosophiques sur les sciences et les savants" and "Considérations sur le pouvoir spirituel" in *Le Producteur* 1 (1825) and 1-2 (1825-26), respectively.

specialisation led to "narrower" minds and the greater preponderance of selfish interests.[567] Modern society, for Comte, thus required moral and intellectual cohesion.

As he had argued in his *Prospectus*, Comte insisted that the scientific class, or *savants*, needed to play the primary role in the harmonisation of contemporary society. In contrast to his earlier work, Comte now developed this argument with explicit reference to Joseph de Maistre, the theocratic thinker whose influential aetiology had likely inspired Saint-Simon's philosophy of history. De Maistre, according to Comte, had "very clearly" identified that European society found itself in a state of crisis and that it was in need of moral and intellectual unity.[568] De Maistre nonetheless sought to return to the old spiritual system, Comte explained, but this system was not suited to present times, and its destruction was "henceforth irrevocable."[569] For Comte, the development of civilisation had seen the replacement of theology and metaphysics by "positive" principles, and it was the responsibility of the *savants*, not the Church, to unify society. By completing the system of "positive philosophy," he argued, the *savants* would be in a position to render the modern sciences "the permanent spiritual basis of the social order," as well as to "regularise" the "spontaneous hierarchies" generated by the division of labour.[570] It was science, in other words, rather than religion or industry, that was the primary lever of social improvement.

The key condition for the stabilisation of contemporary European society, according to Comte, was the development of a "positive" science of society. Restating the arguments in his *Prospectus*, he argued that the development of knowledge followed an "inevitable and continuous" law of progress and moved from a theological, to metaphysical, to a "positive" state.[571] As discussed in

[567] Comte, "Considerations on the Spiritual Power," 209-11.
[568] Comte, "Philosophical Considerations on the Sciences and Scientists," 163, 168.
[569] Comte, "Considerations on the Spiritual Power," 208, n. (e). On the influence of Maistrian ideas on Comte's philosophy, see Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 222-26, 302-05.
[570] Comte, "The Sciences and Scientists," 168-71; "Considerations on the Spiritual Power," 211-14.
[571] Comte, "The Sciences and Scientists," 145.

the previous chapter, Comte considered that every branch of knowledge passed through these stages of development, but he believed that social science, or what he called "social physics," had not yet reached the last state. The science of society was epistemologically distinct from other branches of thought, he also maintained, and its focus was the study of the features and attributes of the collective progress of human society, or what he termed "the natural laws of civilisation." In *Le Producteur*, Comte called on his contemporaries to further the development of this science, arguing that it would serve to complete "the general system of natural philosophy" according to "positive theories." It would also, he insisted, provide the basis for the principles of the moral system suited to nineteenth-century society.[572]

Expanding on his earlier work, Comte now maintained that contemporary social reform involved two, interconnected sets of tasks. The first was scientific in nature, and it consisted in the "formation of social physics." It also involved the consolidation of the scientific class as a centralised and cohesive "corporation" in Europe, whose focus would be the institution of a "positive" system of knowledge.[573] The second set of tasks concerned the elaboration of the moral doctrine that would serve to harmonise the ideas, opinions and habits of European peoples. According to Comte, this required the institution of a uniform system of public education, as well as the diffusion of "general rules of conduct" in society according to positive precepts. These tasks would be the responsibility of the new spiritual power, the *savants*, and it would serve to regenerate the minds of both children and adults.[574]

Comte also now clarified that the means of diffusion of a new moral doctrine in society would rely on the same methods as those of conventional religions. This doctrine would be taught in a "dogmatic" fashion by the *savants*, he explained, and it would rely on "faith" – a form of belief he presented as "a fundamental virtue" – to further "true intellectual and moral communion."

[572] Comte, "The Sciences and Scientists," 159-60, 166.
[573] Comte, "The Sciences and Scientists," 181-86.
[574] Comte, "The Sciences and Scientists," 169-70; "Considerations on the Spiritual Power," 205-06, 214-18.

Unlike religion, however, Comte maintained that the purpose of this doctrine would be to further the social system prescribed by the march of civilisation, or what he here called "the positive and industrial state." To counter the selfish and egotistical tendencies of industrial activity, this doctrine would endeavour to make people accustomed to "the voluntary subordination of private interest to the common interest" and to prepare them "for the particular station" they were to fill in society. This doctrine, Comte insisted, would also seek to overcome social antagonisms by "imposing reciprocal duties on employers and workers," as well as by promoting sentiments of friendship between European nations.[575] In this way, he claimed, the *savants* would mitigate the divisive effects of occupational specialisation and functional hierarchy and further the advent of peace and harmony in Europe.

This vision of social and scientific reform was largely identical to the one Comte had earlier advanced in his *Prospectus*. His references to de Maistre and his emphasis on the "dogmatic" imposition of a new moral doctrine nonetheless magnified the contrast between his approach and that of earlier social theorists. His continued concern with the social leadership of the *savants* still resonated with the earlier philosophies of Condorcet and Destutt de Tracy. Neither of those thinkers, however, would have praised the work of a theocratic theorist, nor would they have relied on faith to foster moral cohesion. As previously discussed, Condorcet promoted the diffusion of knowledge as a way of emancipating individuals from what he considered religious prejudices and superstition, while Destutt de Tracy suggested that social stability was a product of citizens' submission to the laws of the state, not to the dogmatic imposition of a moral doctrine. Following Saint-Simon, Comte considered that the contemporary state of crisis in Europe reflected the lack of a common system of ideas and beliefs. The only solution, in his

[575] Comte, "Considerations on the Spiritual Power," 205, 214-20, 224-26. Comte's emphasis on individual submission to the interests of the greater resonated with de Maistre's "logic of sacrifice." Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 262-63.

view, was the institution of a system with the same authority, if not the same doctrine, as that once held by the Christian Church.

These ideas had a long and well-documented afterlife. Although Comte failed to rally the Saint-Simonians to his particular strand of thought, he would go on to outline the principles of his more fully developed positivist system in his vast and detailed *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42), the work in which he first introduced the term *sociologie*.[576] While Comte later revised his philosophy and famously founded a secular religion celebrating the principles of love, order and progress, the conception of social science he developed in the 1820s and 1830s was highly influential. His emphasis on the advent of "positive" scientific principles had a broad and wide reception in France and elsewhere, while his concern with the specificity of sociology, as an autonomous branch of study, was pivotal in its emergence as a distinct discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century.[577] Comte was not the only thinker to promote the advent of a "positive" social science in *Le Producteur*, however, nor was his approach the only one with a long afterlife. Comte's positivism was matched in ambition by the ideas of two other theorists, Buchez and Rouen.

Buchez's Social Physiology

Philippe Buchez was a graduate of the Paris school of medicine and former member of the French *carbonari*, a secret revolutionary society opposing monarchical government in the early 1820s. He discovered the works of Saint-Simon in 1825 and immediately joined the small circle of followers that had begun to gather around him.[578] Buchez authored articles on a range of

[576] Comte introduced the term, in part, to distinguish his approach from that of the Belgian statistician Adolphe Quételet, who had employed the expression "social physics" in his works. Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 1:605, n. 2. On the split between Comte and the Saint-Simonians, see Pickering, "Comte and the Saint-Simonians," 218-25.
[577] Robert C. Bannister, "Sociology," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 7, *The Modern Social Sciences*, eds. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 328-53.
[578] Armand Cuvillier, *P.-J.-B. Buchez et les origines du socialisme chrétien* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), 13-18; François André Isambert, *De la charbonnerie au saint-simonisme: Étude sur la jeunesse de Buchez* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1966), 144-49.

subjects in *Le Producteur*, from medical legislation and public hygiene to art and literature, and he would emerge as one of the foremost theorists of Saint-Simonian thought in the 1820s. At the centre of Buchez's work in this period was the development of a "positive" science of society derived from physiological principles and concepts, or what he called a "social physiology." Although he did not reference Comte in his articles in *Le Producteur*, his approach differed from that of the proponent of "social physics," and it extended the views developed by Saint-Simon in his later writings, including Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme*. Buchez's strand of positivist thought thus represented an alternative to Comte's, and it was predicated on a distinct and contrasting philosophy of progress.

Buchez, like Comte, maintained that human knowledge followed a pre-determined pattern of development. In his view, however, this pattern did not consist of a three-stage progress, but involved, rather, a succession between "synthetic" and "analytical" stages of reasoning. Adapting Saint-Simon's earlier distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* modes of thought, Buchez insisted that this succession shaped the development of both the individual mind and the collective system of knowledge.[579] This process was also accompanied by a secondary development, he argued, which involved the transition from "the disposition to grasp and perceive the relations between things" to the ability "to classify phenomena in various ways." This "double law" in the development of knowledge reflected the "constant logical routes" of human intelligence, according to Buchez, and these were revealed by historical study of "the succession of the ages of civilisation."[580] Although Buchez did not develop these principles further in *Le Producteur*, they would inform the later philosophy of history of the Saint-Simonians, as I discuss below, along with the broader cosmology of progress Buchez elaborated in the 1830s.

[579] As discussed in chapter four, Saint-Simon had supported this distinction by drawing on Cabanis' physiology.
[580] Philippe Buchez, "Des termes de passage de la physiologie individuelle à la physiologie sociale," pt. 2, *Le Producteur* 4 (1826): 425-26.

Aside from his different philosophy of progress, Buchez defined the nature of "positive" principles in a distinct way to Comte. For Comte, "positive" knowledge was defined by the ability to explain natural phenomena according to certain "invariable laws." For Buchez, it was contingent upon a particular theory of human understanding. The prerequisite for the emergence of "positive" science, he argued in an article on the relationship between different branches of knowledge, was an awareness of "our individuality" and of "the nature of our relations to our environment." This awareness led to the recognition that humans could only study phenomena, "not substances," and establish general laws, "not absolute and independent truths."[581] This theory of knowledge had its origins in the seventeenth-century philosophies of Bacon and Descartes, Buchez maintained, and it had culminated in the physiological "science of man" of Cabanis. Different branches of knowledge would become "positive," he also claimed, once they had been "subordinated" to the principles of this science.[582] In contrast to Comte, Buchez thus conceived of physiology as providing the epistemological foundations of a "positive" system of knowledge. He also maintained that it was the key to linking the study of individual and collective human phenomena.

Buchez's vision of contemporary reform was informed by this approach, and it centred on the analogy between individual and collective forms of activity. Individual human existence, Buchez argued in a set of articles on "social physiology," was defined by three modes of action: those determined by the need for self-preservation, those that enabled an understanding of the external world and those, finally, that were connected to the moral relations that individuals developed with each other.[583] These modes of action were equivalent to three forms of social activity, and these formed the basis of the three, complementary axes of human progress: the production of

[581] Buchez, "Subordination des sciences," *Le Producteur* 4 (1826): 269-70.
[582] Buchez, "Subordination des sciences," 269-72; "De la physiologie," pt. 2, *Le Producteur* 3 (1826): 273-74.
[583] Buchez, "Des termes de passage de la physiologie individuelle à la physiologie sociale," pt. 1, 76-80. Buchez's essay on social physiology was published in two parts in volume 4 of *Le Producteur*, and it was a continuation of his three-part article "De la physiologie," published in the preceding volume.

goods, the development and diffusion of knowledge and the articulation of common moral precepts.[584] Buchez, in this way, reconfigured the typology behind Saint-Simon's earlier theory of social organisation, and he linked industrial, scientific and moral or artistic social activities to different facets of individual existence, not three human "types." In contrast to Comte, he also argued that those activities were complementary and that they each, in different ways, pointed to the "necessity of work," or the "modification of external nature to our advantage." Together, Buchez claimed, those activities represented "the goal of the [human] species and of civilisation."[585]

While Comte proposed the institution of a common moral doctrine by the *savants*, Buchez also gave more emphasis to cultural actors in the development and diffusion of such a doctrine. As he argued in another article in *Le Producteur*, writers and artists should further the advent of a new social order by celebrating the values of "work" and "science." Those values were "the gods of the future," he maintained, and it was them that what he called "our cult" should revere. This was the case, Buchez insisted, because the diffusion of work in society promised a future in which "all men, associated in the project of exploiting nature, would accumulate wealth in proportion to their labour and capacity." Science, meanwhile, "invariably did good," he emphatically declared, and it always took "the side of the poor against the rich, and of the oppressed against the oppressor."[586] If Buchez shared the ideal of a society focused on industrial and scientific activities with Comte, he followed Saint-Simon and attributed a greater role to those capable of stirring human passions and sentiments in the elaboration of the doctrine by which this ideal would be realised.[587] In contrast to Comte, he would also show a greater concern with the plight of the poor.

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[584] Buchez, "Des termes de passage de la physiologie individuelle à la physiologie sociale," pt. 1, 81-85.
[585] Buchez, "Des termes de passage de la physiologie individuelle à la physiologie sociale," pt. 1, 80, 82, 85.
[586] Buchez, "Quelques réflexions sur la littérature et les beaux-arts," *Le Producteur* 4 (1826): 208-11.
[587] In a later review of Comte's work, Buchez would argue – in line with Saint-Simon's earlier critique – that Comte mistakenly gave priority to the *savants* because he attributed too great a significance to reason in the determination of

Buchez's concern with improving the lives of the poor was brought out in a further set of articles about public health and hygiene. Building on his medical training, Buchez presented hygiene as "the application of medical science" to society and its members, and he suggested that it encompassed "all the establishments, institutions and laws whose aim is the physical improvement of men's condition."[588] In those articles, Buchez proposed the execution of a "positive" survey of public hygiene as well as the creation of a national system of "hygienic" councils that would oversee occupational health, urban sanitation and the organisation of prisons and hospitals.[589] Those proposals extended the ideas he had put forward in an earlier work, and they built on the interests and concerns of the public health movement that was emerging in France at the time.[590] Although hygienic reform concerned society as a whole, Buchez made clear that physicians should be especially focused on improving the health of the poor and those he called "the salaried" [*les salariés*], as they had the lowest life expectancy in society and they experienced the greatest "moral and physical suffering." With reference to Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme*, Buchez maintained that society should therefore be organised in the best possible way to improve "the moral and physical existence" of the poor.[591]

This approach resonated with the model of human improvement developed by Cabanis in the 1790s. Like Cabanis, Buchez proposed the development of a system of public hygiene as a means of improving physical well-being, as well as of mitigating the effects of inequality in society. While Cabanis proposed the institution of individualised "life plans" in order to harmonise capacities in society, however, Buchez promoted a more collective approach to

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human conduct, and not enough to moral sentiments. Philippe Buchez, review of *Cours de philosophie positive*, by Auguste Comte, *Journal des progrès des sciences et institutions médicales*, 2nd series, 1 (1830): 284.

588 Buchez, "De l'hygiène," *Le Producteur* 5 (1826): 48.

589 Buchez, "Du projet de loi sur les écoles de médecine et la police médicale," *Le Producteur* 3 (1826): 176-77; "De l'hygiène," 61.

590 Philippe Buchez and Ulysse Trélat, *Précis élémentaire d'hygiène* (Paris, 1825). On the early nineteenth-century public health movement in France, see William Coleman, *Death is a Social Disease: Public Health and Political Economy in Early Industrial France.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); Ann La Berge, *Mission and Method*: *The Early Nineteenth-century Public Health Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). On Buchez and Trélat's conception of public health, see Quinlan, *Great Nation in Decline*, 166-68.

591 Buchez, "Du projet de loi," 177-78, n. 1; "De l'hygiène," 58-62.

human well-being, emphasising the creation of a national system of "hygienic" councils and the physical betterment of the poor and the "salaried" as a social class. Buchez also developed these proposals as part of an approach that looked to the development of a uniform system of morality, not the advent of individual rights or the consolidation of republican government. Extending Saint-Simon's works, Buchez promoted the regeneration of ideas and sentiments in society through the institution of a "cult" celebrating the values of science and work. In contrast to the domestic focus of French republicans in the 1790s, Buchez's perspective was also international in scope, and, as he described it in one of his articles, he hoped to one day see a world "united as one people by industry, science and sympathy."[592]

Like Comte, Buchez thus called for the development of a "positive" science of society. He also similarly presented the principles of this science as crucial to the stabilisation and harmonisation of contemporary society. Buchez nonetheless conceived of social science differently to Comte, and he emphasised its close connection to physiology. Buchez also advanced different proposals for reform, highlighting the role of cultural actors in the diffusion of a new moral doctrine and underlining the importance of public health and hygiene. Although this approach built on certain elements of Cabanis' earlier model of human improvement, it closely followed the vision of progress developed by Saint-Simon in his later works. While Comte built on Saint-Simon's "organic" theory of social organisation, however, with its emphasis on functional differentiation, the inequality of capacities and the leadership of certain pre-eminent social classes, Buchez extended Saint-Simon's ideal of a society of workers organised in the interests of the poor. Buchez, in this way, outlined the principles of a distinct and divergent strand of "positive" thought after Saint-Simon.

[592] Buchez, "Quelques réflexions sur la littérature et les beaux-arts," 210-11.

Although it has not received the same degree of attention as Comte's social science, Buchez's approach also had a long and enduring legacy in nineteenth-century France. His social physiology would, in the first instance, shape the Saint-Simonians' critique of Comte, and they would oppose Comte's overly scientistic conceptions by reiterating Buchez's insistence on the importance of moral passions and sentiments.[593] The Saint-Simonians would also develop the view that history oscillated between periods of "organic" unity and "critical" disintegration – the central axiom of their philosophy of history – by drawing directly on Buchez's philosophy of progress.[594] Although Buchez formally broke with the Saint-Simonians when they established themselves as a "church," he continued to develop his own project of a "positive" social science in the 1830s. As I discuss in more detail below, under the July Monarchy Buchez would nonetheless seek to reconcile this project with the advent of a neo-Catholic moral principles, and he would develop a vast and elaborate cosmology of progress drawing on contemporary ideas of natural science. Despite attracting only a small group of followers, this cosmology would play an important role in shaping early socialist thought in France in the lead up to 1848.[595]

Rouen's Anti-Individualistic Science

The third and last strand of "positive" thought developed in *Le Producteur* is the least well-known. Pierre-Isidore Rouen, a lawyer by trade, composed a series of articles in the journal on issues relating to political economy, the development of industry and the science of society. Although he faded into obscurity after his involvement in *Le Producteur*, he developed a unique approach that linked the principles of a "positive" social science to a project of reform that looked to the advent of equality in society. Rouen's approach combined different elements of Comte and Buchez's social sciences, but it was also developed on the basis of a distinct and original

[593] For the Saint-Simonians' critique of Comte, see *Doctrine de Saint-Simon. Exposition, première année, 1829*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1830), 373-88.
[594] Eckalbar, "The Saint-Simonian Philosophy of History"; Isambert, "Époques critiques et époques organiques."
[595] On Buchez and his "school," the best account remains François André Isambert, *Politique, religion et science de l'homme chez Philippe Buchez (1796-1865)* (Paris: Cujas, 1967), 41-70.

philosophy of progress. Rouen articulated the principles of this philosophy through a rejection of the moral and political system he associated with what he called "individualism" (*individualisme*), a term he coined. Despite being largely forgotten, Rouen's strand of "positive" thought represented an innovative interpretation of Saint-Simon's moral and intellectual conceptions, and it would shape the ideas of Saint-Simon's followers in the 1830s. The introduction of the term "individualism" would also be crucial in the subsequent invention of its conceptual antonym, "socialism."

Rouen developed the principles of his approach in *Le Producteur* through a critique of the political economy of Charles Dunoyer. An ally of Saint-Simon in the early years of the Restoration, Dunoyer promoted the advent of a society organised around "industrial" principles in his works. As discussed in the previous chapter, this approach had affinities with Saint-Simon's social philosophy, but Dunoyer conceived of those principles as aligned with individual freedom, and he and his associate Charles Comte opposed Saint-Simon's emphasis on the need for a uniform moral doctrine. Reviewing Dunoyer's *L'industrie et la morale considérées dans leur rapport avec la liberté* (1825), Rouen maintained that this work was the latest iteration of the "critical" conception of politics that had emerged in the eighteenth century. This conception treated society as if it were merely a "collection of men," he argued, and it emphasised the purely individual rights and duties of its members. Rouen further maintained that the moral system that had emerged from this conception, and which he called "individualism," had rightfully contributed to the "destruction of the old social order," but it could not supply the principles for contemporary reform.[596]

Dunoyer's approach was lacking, according to Rouen, because it was not grounded in a "positive" science of society. This science was focused, not on the study of individual faculties,

[596] Pierre-Isidore Rouen, "Examen d'un nouvel ouvrage de M. Dunoyer, ancien rédacteur du Censeur Européen," pt. 1, *Le Producteur* 2 (1826): 159-63.

Rouen explained, but on the analysis of society "in all its facets." What Rouen termed the "direct and positive study of society" was concerned with "humanity in its entirety," and it examined the continuous and uninterrupted series of processes behind the development of the human species, conceived as a "collective being."[597] Echoing Comte, Rouen argued that social science could not be based on either physiology or psychology, and he referred his readers to Comte's *Prospectus* in one of his notes.[598] Rouen nonetheless stressed, in a way that resonated more closely with Buchez's approach, that "positive" social science recognised that three "modes of social activity" – science, industry and the fine arts – were necessary to the stability and harmony of contemporary society. In a similar way to Buchez, Rouen also emphasised that it was by appealing to the "power of social sentiments" that reformers could reconcile scientific and industrial activities and recognise the "common dignity and value" of the different members of society, whatever their position or occupation.[599]

Rouen's conception of social science thus combined elements of Comte and Buchez's approaches. Rouen maintained, like the first, that this science was epistemologically distinct from other branches of knowledge and that it focused on the collective development of human society over time. In contrast to Comte, however, Rouen did not attribute a pre-eminent role to the *savants* in the elaboration of a new moral doctrine, and he followed Buchez in underlining the importance of moral sentiments in the diffusion of this doctrine. Like Buchez, Rouen's approach resonated with Saint-Simon's earlier critique of Comte, and it evoked Saint-Simon's rejection of Comte's emphasis on the primacy of scientific activities in society. Rouen's views also spoke to long-running differences of opinions, between the proponents of a science of society in France, on which aspects of social life provided the primary levers of progress and whether the regeneration of human sentiments and passions had a role to play in stabilising social relations.

[597] Rouen, "Examen d'un nouvel ouvrage de M. Dunoyer," pt. 1, 159-60.
[598] Rouen, "Examen d'un nouvel ouvrage de M. Dunoyer," pt. 1, 159; pt. 3, *Le Producteur* 3: 143, n. 1.
[599] Rouen, "Examen d'un nouvel ouvrage de M. Dunoyer," pt. 3, 144-46.

Unlike the disputes of the late eighteenth century, however, Rouen's approach was, similarly to Comte and Buchez's, shaped by an analysis of the relationship between different modes of social activity, rather than an assessment of individual conduct.

Notwithstanding those similarities with Comte and Buchez, Rouen's model of social improvement was also based on a distinct and original philosophy of progress. Comte, as discussed, argued that human knowledge followed a three-stage law of development, while Buchez insisted on the succession between "synthetic" and "analytical" stages of reasoning. In a set of articles entitled "De la classe ouvrière," Rouen, in contrast, maintained that human history was characterised by a "double movement": periods in which the dominant tendency was the improvement of individual faculties, and others in which those in the "general interest" took precedence. Those periods typically overlapped with each other, he argued, but they were nevertheless defined by distinct and opposing moral systems. Rouen also further maintained they were associated with two different modes of social improvement. While the "practical" improvement of industrial production favoured the development of individual interests and material conditions, he claimed, the "theoretical" pursuit of knowledge fostered the growth of collective sentiments and ideas.[600]

These views foregrounded a series of additional claims in which Rouen described what he took to be recent historical developments in Europe and outlined their implications. The last three centuries had seen the growth of "industrial forces" in Europe, he argued, and this had contributed to the development of commerce, credit and financial institutions. This period, according to Rouen, had also seen the regeneration of scientific and philosophical conceptions and the emergence of a theory of knowledge based on "systematic and positive foundations." Rouen then predicted that the near future would see the fusion of this theory of knowledge with

[600] Rouen, "De la classe ouvrière," pt. 2, *Le Producteur* 4 (1826): 293-95.

industrial activities, and that this would engender a "universal association" grounded in "a new code of social morality."[601] With reference to Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme*, he argued that this new order would be organised in the interests of "the poorest and most numerous class in society," and that it would encourage the "more equal distribution of work and pleasures."[602] Expanding on Saint-Simon's ideas, Rouen also suggested that this order would see the "fusion of classes" – a process instigated, he claimed, during the French Revolution – and that it would realise the "true" and "practical" equality of capacities in society.[603]

In place of Dunoyer's "individualism," but also Comte's emphasis on functional differentiation and hierarchy, Rouen outlined a vision of industrial society organised around egalitarian principles of social cohesion. This vision built on the ideal of a society of workers promoted by Saint-Simon in his later works. It also resonated with the approach outlined by Buchez in his own set of articles in *Le Producteur*. Rouen nonetheless promoted the equalisation of social and economic conditions to a greater extent than those thinkers. Although he promoted the "growth of equality" in his later texts, Saint-Simon had emphasised the "natural" leadership of particular classes in society. Buchez, meanwhile, called for the betterment of the lives of the poor and salaried class, but he did so primarily by suggesting improvements in public health and hygiene. Rouen, in contrast, envisaged a social order in which class differences were not only mitigated, but eliminated. Although he looked back to the French Revolution in developing this approach, Rouen did not revive what he considered "individualistic" principles of right and morality. In contrast to Condorcet or Cabanis, he promoted the convergence of capacities by calling for the

[601] Rouen, "De la classe ouvrière," pt. 2, 300-302.
[602] Rouen, "De la classe ouvrière," pt. 1, *Le Producteur* 3 (1826): 306-07; pt. 2, 292.
[603] "De cette fusion, nous voyons résulter une égalité pratique infiniment plus réelle et plus profonde que celle que les lois ont pu constituer jamais chez aucun peuple. L'égalité française n'est point l'égalité métaphysique et de par la loi des Américains, c'est l'égalité sentie et pratiquée telle que la philanthropie la définit. La capacité pratique généralement répandue, la fusion des classes et l'égalité réelle que l'on rencontre en France sont les premières conditions politiques de l'association scientifique industrielle." Rouen, "De la classe ouvrière," pt. 2, 305-06.

amalgamation or "fusion" of the collective groups that comprised society, not the perfectibility of individual faculties.

The practical proposals Rouen put forward in *Le Producteur* further underlined the particular characteristics of his collective model of improvement. Rouen insisted, on the one hand, that social progress required the elaboration of new "body of morality" as well as a system of "positive" education, devised by society's *savants*, artists and moralists. Although Rouen did not detail what the content of those would be, he argued that these would serve to meet the moral and intellectual needs of all the members of society, and of the class of workers in particular.[604] He also maintained, in a way that recalled Comte's approach, that the diffusion of a new moral doctrine required an appeal to faith, and that it would involve the imposition of particular "maxims" in society. In tune with his critique of individualism, Rouen opposed the principles of the "independence of minds" and of the liberty of conscience, and he promoted the diffusion of a doctrine that would employ the same methods of authority as religion.[605] It was in this way, he suggested, that a new "spiritual power" would be in a position to regenerate "the ideas and sentiments" of the "mass of society."[606]

In addition to a new moral doctrine, Rouen also suggested a series of more original proposals that related to the reform of financial institutions and economic relations. Drawing on aspects of Saint-Simon's political economy, Rouen promoted a new system of investment, as well as new forms of remuneration, to further industrial production and moral harmony in contemporary society. In his first article in *Le Producteur*, he proposed the creation of a joint-stock company between European bankers, or an industrial financing company (*société commanditaire de l'industrie*), that would redirect "idle" capital to productive activities. This organisation would work in partnership with the *savants* and the industrial class, Rouen suggested, and further the

[604] Rouen, "De la classe ouvrière," pt. 1, 310-11.
[605] Rouen, "De la classe ouvrière," pt. 2, 316.
[606] Rouen, "Sur la division du pouvoir," pt. 1, *Le Producteur* 4 (1826): 492.

development of all kinds of enterprises "that aimed to improve, either a commercial, agricultural or manufacturing branch of industry" or that sought to improve particular "processes and machines" within different economic sectors.[607] In his article on the working class, Rouen also proposed the introduction of a system of payment by which workers would receive a portion of the profits of their companies. This type of arrangement would harmonise relations between workers and the heads of industry, he claimed, and further what he described as "universal association" in society.[608]

Rouen was not the only theorist to promote a collective model of improvement in *Le Producteur*, nor was he the only one to propose economic and financial reforms to harmonise social relations. He was the only writer, however, to link the principles of a "positive" social science with a project of reform that looked to the advent of equality in society. Although he would not go on to have a memorable career among the Saint-Simonians, his emphasis on the need to combine moral and economic regeneration informed Saint-Simonian projects for the reform of credit and banking in the 1830s, shaping what Frank Manuel once called their "utopia of finance capital."[609] More significantly, the term "individualism" would become widely adopted after Rouen, and it likely inspired the later introduction of the notion of "socialism."[610] This term, as I discuss in more detail below, was coined by Pierre Leroux in the aftermath of wage protests by silk workers in Lyon. Although Leroux first introduced the term as a critical descriptor for the Saint-Simonians' social philosophy, it would have well suited Rouen's anti-individualistic model

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607 Rouen, "Société commanditaire de l'industrie," *Le Producteur* 1 (1825): 14; cited in Gilles Jacoud, *Political Economy and Industrialism: Banks in Saint-Simonian Economic Thought* (Routledge: London, 2010), 24.

608 Rouen suggested that such a system could be gradually introduced, and that it might involve, in the first instance, a system that combined traditional forms of salary with payments derived from a company's profits. Rouen, "De la classe ouvrière," pt. 2, 308-09, 314.

609 Manuel, *Prophets of Paris*, 177. More generally, see Jacoud, *Banks in Saint-Simonian Economic Thought*. There are very few references to Rouen after his participation in *Le Producteur*, but he appears to have pursued a career as a lamp-maker.

610 Marie-France Piguet, "Individualisme: Origine et réception initiale du mot," *Oeuvres & Critiques* 33, no. 1 (2008): 39-60; "Débats politiques sur la liberté individuelle et raisons langagières dans l'émergence du mot individualisme," *Libertés et libéralismes: Formation et circulation des concepts*, eds. Jacques Guilhaumou, Jean-Louis Fournel and Jean-Pierre Potier, (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2012), 165-83.

of improvement.[611] In contrast to the theorists who would later come to be associated with the concept, however, Rouen's model was one that was oriented towards social harmony, not class conflict.

The Cosmologies of Early Socialism

Following several years of social and political turmoil, opposition to the policies of the conservative King, Charles X, led to his overthrow in July 1830 and the introduction of a more liberal regime. The order that followed, known as the July Monarchy, saw the expansion of the suffrage, the abolition of strict censorship laws and the recognition of a broader set of freedoms.[612] This new order nonetheless placed power in the hands of the wealthy, and the inability of elites to address poverty in the general population, combined with recurring economic crises, would lead to renewed calls for reform in France. Those calls were shaped by critiques of liberal political economy, and they resurrected republican discourses of rights, equality and popular sovereignty. These discourses nonetheless now became associated with the fluid idiom of "association" as well as with religiously inspired conceptions of morality and politics.[613] They also came to be connected to vast cosmologies of progress that sought to further radical projects of social transformation by drawing, in part, on contemporary ideas of natural science. Although they have largely faded from memory, those cosmologies were intimately connected to the strand of moral and political thought that became known as socialism.

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[611] Pierre Leroux, "Cours d'économie politique fait à l'Athénée de Marseille par M. Jules Leroux," Économie politique, *Revue encyclopédique* 60 (Oct-Dec 1833 [1834]): 106-09; later republished as "De l'individualisme et du socialisme," in *Œuvres de Pierre Leroux (1825-1850)*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1850-51), vol. 1 (1850), 365-80.
[612] Pamela P. Pilbeam, *The 1830 Revolution in France* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France, 1814-1871* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1995), 95-154.
[613] Berenson, "Political Opposition and Populist Religion during the July Monarchy," chap. 2 in *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France,* 3-73; William Sewell, "The July Revolution and the Emergence of Class Consciousness," chap. 9 in *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

Two of the theorists who developed the most elaborate cosmologies of progress under the July Monarchy were Leroux and Buchez. Leroux, a typographer by trade and once a follower of Saint-Simon, formulated an approach based on the principle of "continuous progress." Building on the evolutionary theory of the naturalist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Leroux maintained that all forms of life, from the celestial to the social, were shaped by gradual and cumulative series of developments. This, he argued, pointed to the need to harmonise contemporary social relations by developing a new system of belief that both synthesised and superseded previous moral doctrines, a system he came to call the "religion of humanity." Buchez, in contrast, maintained that the higher law of progress involved a succession of distinct and separate phases of development. Inspired by the natural science of Georges Cuvier, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's rival, Buchez argued that developments in every order of reality were defined by abrupt and sudden changes and that progress, in the social realm, was determined by God's successive revelations. On this basis, he insisted that European society remained in the Christian age and that moral harmonisation required, not a new religion, but a regenerated Christianity.

Extending the earlier perspective of Saint-Simon's followers, Leroux and Buchez both called for the elaboration of a uniform system of belief, or doctrine, to sustain the moral cohesion and harmony of modern society. Unlike discussions between Saint-Simonians in the 1820s, however, they did not disagree over the relative pre-eminence of science, industry or art in the reform of contemporary society. Leroux and Buchez in fact supported relatively similar projects of reform in their time, and, in tune with the movement of opposition under the July Monarchy, they both promoted the advent of individual rights, the extension of the franchise and the development of more cooperative forms of workplace organisation. They nonetheless diverged over the content of the moral system best suited to sustain and consolidate such reforms. Adapting Saint-Simon's earlier approach, and drawing on the contemporary revival of religious notions of sacrifice and devotion, Leroux and Buchez put forward distinct and contrasting visions of spiritual renewal in

the 1830s and 1840s. They did so by elaborating alternative theories of the principles of development at work throughout the natural and super-natural worlds, or what I have called cosmologies of progress.

Those cosmologies illustrate something of the fate of the models of improvement at the heart of the search for a science of society in nineteenth-century France. Although their use of natural science evoked Saint-Simon's earlier appeal to the ideas of Buffon and Lamarck, neither Leroux nor Buchez relied on natural history to support pre-existing forms of hierarchy or domination in society. While Leroux revived the concept of perfectibility in his works, meanwhile, he did not do so to promote the primacy of individual forms of improvement, but to present his own philosophy as an extension of a century-long movement of ideas in Europe. Buchez, for his part, described his approach as a continuation of his earlier social physiology, but he now sought to reconcile his "positive" social science with moral ideals he associated with both the French Revolution as well as with neo-Catholic religious principles. Both Leroux and Buchez followed the focus of Saint-Simon and his followers on the collective processes behind the development of human society over time. They nonetheless pursued this focus by connecting those processes, in new and original ways, to what they considered the universal law of progress.

Leroux and Buchez's cosmological aspirations drew closely, if implicitly, on the fantastical ideas of Charles Fourier. A provincial autodidact, Fourier developed a visionary social theory in the early nineteenth century that matching the ambition, if not the principles, of Saint-Simon's philosophy. It is well known that this theory informed the thought of the Saint-Simonians in the late 1820s and early 1830s, and that it was also crucial in the emergence of early French socialism.[614] The role that Fourier's ideas played in shaping Leroux and Buchez's approaches, however, has been less examined. Although they did not share Fourier's sexual politics, and they

[614] Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World*; *Victor Considerant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism*. See also Picon, "Utopian Socialism and Social Science."

opposed his practical proposals for reform, Leroux and Buchez's concern with articulating comprehensive accounts of processes of change in all realms of reality, and in bringing those processes back to a single principle, cannot be understood without taking into account the works of Fourier. Before exploring Leroux and Buchez's respective conceptions of progress, it is therefore instructive to examine the reception of Fourier's ideas among the Saint-Simonians. This will serve to illuminate the principles behind Leroux and Buchez's approaches, along with the broader conceptual underpinnings of the theories of progress behind early French socialism.

Fourier, the Saint-Simonians and Early Socialism

A clerk and journalist from Lyon, who pursued a variety of occupations in his lifetime, Fourier set out a radical and provocative project of reform in a series of works in the early nineteenth century, which included *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (1808) and *Théorie de l'association domestique-agricole* (1822). Although his project promised to return human society to natural principles of order and harmony, it initially failed to attract much public attention. After moving to Paris in the 1820s, Fourier nonetheless sought to publicise his ideas more actively, and he made contact with the Welsh reformer Robert Owen, as well as with the Saint-Simonians. In the late 1820s, he then published a less controversial version of his system, *Le nouveau monde industriel* (1829), and he sent this work to one of the leading figures in the Saint-Simonian movement, Barthélemy-Prosper Enfantin, along with a letter urging him to "change his alliance." Although Enfantin declined the offer, the Saint-Simonians were inspired by Fourier's ideas.[615] Several of them would also later convert to Fourier's system and they would promote their own versions of *la science sociale*, in France and elsewhere, in the nineteenth century.[616]

[615] Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World*, 413-30.
[616] The best recent account of Fourier-inspired social science in nineteenth-century France can be found in Rignol, *Les hiéroglyphes de la nature.*

Fourier's project of reform was based on a combined a critique of traditional marriage, and the sexual relations on which it was predicated, and of modern industrial relations, and the civilisation that had engendered them. Marriage and modern industry fostered oppression, according to Fourier, as the first enchained men and reduced women "to servitude," while the second generated moral and physical suffering and was organised "around some reversal of the natural order."[617] A more felicitous and harmonious social order, he argued in his works, required the reorganisation of society around the natural set of passions with which humans were endowed. There were twelve basic human passions, Fourier maintained, and the various combination of these accounted for all different personalities. An ideal society would consist in a small-scale community that incorporated all those combinations, he proposed, and that was organised in such a way as to allow human interests and desires to freely flourish, without the need for external coercion or repression. Fourier suggested that such communities, which he called "phalansteries" (*phalanstères*), would recognise a single right, "the right to work," and they would further free love and the emancipation of women.[618]

Although he re-joined Helvétius and Condorcet's concern with the condition of women, Fourier did not promote the natural equality of the sexes or celebrate the domestic virtues of traditional family. His approach was based instead on a wild and outlandish cosmology. As Fourier presented it in *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, there existed an analogy between the four orders of existence – the material, the organic, the animal and the social – and these orders were shaped by the same principle of "passionate attraction." Fourier argued that this principle of motion, which he presented as a synthesis of Newton and Leibniz's natural philosophies, governed processes in all four orders and that they produced the different set of affinities and oppositions within

[617] Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* [1808], eds. Gareth Stedman-Jones and Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7, 112.
[618] The freedom of women was, he claimed, "the basic principle of all social progress." Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, 132, 262-63.

them.[619] In accordance with this principle, he suggested that the social universe followed a preestablished pattern of development, or what he called a "series," which would culminate in a state of "universal harmony" in which men and women would be freed from the clutches of modern civilisation.[620] More fantastically, Fourier also envisioned that this development would see what he called the "birth of the Northern crown," or the broadening of the aurora borealis over the North pole, as well as the transformation of the chemical composition of the sea, which would acquire the flavour of a "kind of lemonade."[621]

Despite their eccentricity, these ideas were instrumental in the development of Saint-Simonian thought in the late 1820s. Although they did not explicitly acknowledge his influence, the Saint-Simonians' newfound interest in the emancipation of both workers and women in this period directly followed Fourier's critique of modern industry and conventional relations between the sexes.[622] Notwithstanding Buchez and Rouen's asseverations, in *Le Producteur* Saint-Simon's followers had tended to celebrate the advent of industrial society. In the public lectures that they subsequently delivered, and that were then published as *Doctrine de Saint-Simon* (1829), they put a greater emphasis on the discord and inequity of a society divided into two classes, the idle and the workers (*les oisifs et les travailleurs*), and they called for the abolition of property inheritance, a proposal that had not appeared in previous iterations of their thought. Echoing Fourier, the Saint-Simonians also became concerned with the plight of women, and they celebrated the harmonising potential of love, along with the liberation of sensual pleasures – none of which had featured either in the thought of Saint-Simon or in *Le Producteur*.[623] It was the principles of the

[619] Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, 15-16.
[620] On the concept of a "series" in early French socialism, see John Tresch, "The Order of the Prophets: Series in Early French Social Science and Socialism," *History of Science* 48, no. 3-4 (2010): 315-42.
[621] Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, 47-56.
[622] As argued by Gareth Stedman-Jones in "European Socialism from the 1790s to the 1890s," 204-05.
[623] For the Saint-Simonians' new political economy, see *Doctrine de Saint-Simon* (1829), esp. "Sixième séance. Transformation successive de l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, et du droit de propriété" and "Huitième séance. Théories modernes sur la propriété."

ensuing Saint-Simonian religion that would nonetheless most closely resonate with Fourier's cosmology of universal harmony.

Founded in December 1829, with Enfantin as one of its leaders, the Saint-Simonian Church combined Saint-Simon's call for the establishment of a new religion with the principles of Fourier's idiosyncratic social philosophy. Following Fourier, the Saint-Simonians outlined a religious doctrine that looked to "universal association," within and between societies, through the harmonisation of relations between men and women. Developing Fourier's conceptions, the Saint-Simonians conceived of this harmonisation as the condition for the "harmonic union" of the two facets of human existence, matter and spirit (which they presented as an improvement on the deleterious effects of Christian dualism), and they suggested that this union would further the reconciliation of science and industry in society, as well as of the East and the West in global humanity. Unlike Fourier, however, they promoted the pantheistic idea of a "world-God," along with the moral and spiritual leadership of Saint-Simonian priests.[624] In keeping with Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians also continued to call for social reorganisation around the principles of individual capacity, occupational specialisation and functional hierarchy. They nonetheless now emphasised the consolidation of power, not of the *savants*, but of a priestly caste. The Saint-Simonian religion in this way looked to the advent of what could be called an "industrial theocracy."[625]

These views shaped Leroux and Buchez's conceptions of progress in important ways, and they would both adapt different elements of the philosophies of Fourier and the Saint-Simonians. In line with these philosophies, Leroux and Buchez stressed the social antagonism between the labouring and property-owning classes in their works, and they emphasised the need to

[624] This doctrine was laid out in *Religion saint-simonienne. Morale. Réunion générale de la Famille. Enseignmenents du Père Suprême. Les Trois Familles* (Paris, 1832).
[625] Antoine Picon, "La religion saint-simonienne," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 87, no. 1 (2003): 29.

restructure society around more equitable principles.[626] Although they opposed Enfantin's aspirations for spiritual leadership, Leroux and Buchez followed the Saint-Simonians in seeing the moral harmonisation of modern society as a condition of the institution of a uniform religious doctrine.[627] While they had little affinity with Fourier's theory of "passionate attraction," they also promoted their respective visions of reform by developing expansive theories of progress predicated on the analogy between the different orders or realms of reality. If they substituted nineteenth-century conceptions of natural science for Fourier's attempted synthesis of Newton and Leibniz, Leroux and Buchez's cosmologies of progress were, at least in part, a response to Fourier's unique and far-fetched "theory of the four movements."

Despite those similarities, Leroux and Buchez nonetheless diverged in a fundamental way from Fourier and the Saint-Simonians, and this divergence was crucial to their respective projects of reform. Both Fourier and the Saint-Simonians virulently rejected the principles of individual rights and political equality, which they associated with revolutionary violence and discord.[628] Leroux and Buchez, in contrast, promoted their religious doctrines as a continuation of those ideals. Leroux described the "principle of equality cultivated" in the eighteenth century as the basis for his "new conception of God and humanity," and he conceived of "the revolution of 89" as the "prelude" for the "great social renovation" of the future.[629] Buchez described the French Revolution as the "most beautiful work" in the history of human equality and maintained that its principles followed the moral conceptions earlier "announced by Christ."[630] Neither

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[626] See thee remarks in Pierre Leroux, "De la tendance nouvelle des idées," *Revue encyclopédique* 53 (January 1832): 2-3; Philippe Buchez, "Introduction," *Journal des sciences morales et politiques* 1, no. 1 (3 December 1831): 1; "Économie politique," *Journal des sciences morales et politiques* 1, no. 1 (3 December 1831): 10.
[627] Buchez, as mentioned, broke with the Saint-Simonians in 1829, when they established themselves as "church." Leroux left in 1831. Jean-Pierre Lacassagne, "Pierre Leroux, Saint-Simon et les saint-simoniens," *Économies et sociétés* 7, no. 1 (January 1973): 57-91; "De la charbonnerie au socialisme: l'itinéraire politique de Pierre Leroux," *Revue des travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques* 124, no. 4 (1971): 189-206.
[628] The Saint-Simonians derided the declarations of rights they associated with "critical" periods of history. *Doctrine de Saint-Simon*, 79-81. Fourier described equality as a cause that had mowed down "three million young men." He also rejected the revolutionary discourse of individual perfectibility, or what he described, mockingly, as "the system of perfectible perfectibility." *Theory of the Four Movements*, 82, 280.
[629] Leroux, "De la tendance nouvelle des idées," 4, 8.
[630] [Buchez], "De l'égalité," pt. 1, *L'Européen, Journal des sciences morales et économiques* 1, no. 11 (11 February 1832): 162.

thinker, however, sought to return to the individual models of improvement of the late eighteenth century, and they each emphasised the collective and pre-determined laws behind social progress. Their respective approaches thus drew on Fourier's cosmological imagination to further projects of reform that combined elements of the politics of the French Revolution with the Saint-Simonians' vision of moral and spiritual regeneration.

The conceptual synthesis that Leroux and Buchez each sought to effect in their works can be illuminated by turning to the article in which the term *socialisme* first appeared in print.[631] This article, composed by Leroux shortly after *la révolte des canuts*, a series of protests by silk workers in Lyon in 1834, explained that two systems divided nineteenth-century "social science." Building on Rouen's terminological innovation, Leroux suggested that the proponents of "individualism" promoted the protection of property as well as self-centred and egoistic principles of morality. The supporters of "socialism," in contrast, called for the reorganisation of society according to "organic" principles of functional differentiation and hierarchy, and disregarded individual liberty. Both systems were inadequate, according to Leroux, and it was necessary to find a third way in which "the perfection of society" was reconciled with "the liberty of each and of all."[632] Following this particular iteration of the terms, Leroux's own "social science" would be an attempt to combine and supersede the doctrines of individualism and socialism.[633] Buchez's

[631] Although Leroux was not aware of these earlier uses, the term had previously been employed in other languages to describe accounts of human sociability that followed the natural law theory of Samuel von Pufendorf. On these uses, see Sophus A. Reinert, "Enlightenment socialism: Cesare Beccaria and His Critics," in *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment*, eds. Béla Kapossy, Isaac Nakhimovsky and Richard Whatmore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 125-54.
[632] Leroux, "Cours d'économie politique fait à l'Athénée de Marseille par M. Jules Leroux," 107-08, 113.
[633] The term "socialism" was redefined to include the broader set of philosophies that promoted the radical transformation of society only in the late 1830s, following a series of influential essays by the political economist Louis Reybaud. Reybaud's initial study initially covered the thought of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and their followers, before being expanded, in later editions of the work, to include a broader range of thinkers, including Leroux. On this study, in context of the reception of Owen's ideas in France and the related political economy of Adolphe Blanqui, see Thomas Hopkins, "Liberal Economists and Owenism: Blanqui and Reybaud," *History of European Ideas* 47, no. 2 (2021): 231-51.

approach was not all that different.[634] Each would attempt to do so, however, by articulating cosmologies of progress inspired by different strands of contemporary natural science.

Leroux's Religion of Progress

Shortly after breaking with the Saint-Simonians, Leroux set out the principles of his vision of progress in a set of articles in *Revue encyclopédique*, a journal that became a refuge for Saint-Simonian dissidents in the early 1830s.[635] Reflecting on the state of contemporary thought, Leroux suggested that European society was on the cusp of a "great renovation of the human mind." The past fifty years had seen a range of complementary developments, he remarked, and these had included "the dogma of progress and perfectibility" of Turgot, Condorcet and Saint-Simon, the array of literary and philosophical works inspired by Kant and Goethe in Germany, the works of the "philosophical naturalists" Lamarck and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire as well as the philosophy of neo-Catholic theorists like Félicité Lamennais. The "admirable synchronism" of these developments testified to the harmonisation of different areas of knowledge, according to Leroux. It also pointed, however, to the need for new cohesive system of ideas and beliefs, or what Leroux called a "general doctrine." This doctrine, he suggested, would have to be a "religion of progress."[636]

A collective movement of ideas was unfolding in nineteenth-century Europe, according to Leroux, and this movement was both the inspiration and the proof behind his model of improvement. Although Leroux renewed an appeal to the concept of perfectibility in his works, he did so to highlight the continuity of ideas behind modern ideas of progress, rather than to

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634 For a comparable evaluation of Leroux and Buchez's approaches, in the context of their critique of Saint-Simonianism, see Michael C. Behrent, "The Mystical Body of Society: Religion and Association in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no. 2 (2008): 229-34.

635 Aurélien Aramini and Vincent Bourdeau, "Synthèse et association. La Revue encyclopédique de Leroux, Reynaud et Carnot," in *Quand les socialistes inventaient l'avenir*, 84-96.

636 Leroux, "De la tendance nouvelle des idées," 3-6, 8. On the reception of German works and ideas in the thought of Leroux, see Philippe Régnier, "Pierre Leroux entre le saint-simonisme et la référence allemande," in *Transferts. Relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIII^e^-XIX^e^ siècles)*, eds. Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988), 447-64.

revive the models of the eighteenth century. As he explained in a further series of articles in *Revue encyclopédique* between 1833-35, and later published together as *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité* (1851), the idea of human perfectibility had its origins in the seventeenth-century philosophies of Pascal and Descartes, where it had been associated with the emancipation of individual reason. It had then been developed in the eighteenth century by a range of thinkers, including Turgot and Condorcet, and become linked to the idea of collective emancipation "from the chains of the past." The final step in the development of this idea, according to Leroux, had seen the extension of the notion of progress to the research of naturalists and other scientists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It was their works, he maintained, that had revealed the central tenet of a new religious system: the principle of "continuous progress."[637]

Leroux's key reference in articulating this claim was the evolutionary theory of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. Adapting the earlier ideas of Lamarck, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire developed an influential account of the transmutation of species in the 1820s, which, drawing on his research in comparative anatomy and palaeontology, provided a new interpretation of the continuity of animal forms. This account rested on the idea that a "unity of plan" underpinned the formation of all living beings and that this plan explained the variety of different forms taken by animal species.[638] Close personally to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Leroux reviewed his work at the Académie des sciences in the late 1820s and closely followed the development of his theory of natural evolution.[639] In the articles in which he set out his theory of progress in *Revue encyclopédique*, Leroux praised Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire as a "great naturalist" and insisted that his "beautiful

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[637] Leroux, *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*, in *Œuvres de Pierre Leroux*, vol. 2 (1851), 26-31. This work combined three earlier articles: "De la loi de continuité qui unit le dix-huitième siècle au dix-septième, ou de l'origine de la doctrine de la perfectibilité," *Revue encyclopédique* 57 (March 1833): 465-538; "Préface. Aux souscripteurs de la Revue" (subsequently retitled "De la doctrine du progrès continu"), *Revue encyclopédique* 60 (October-December 1834): i-lxxi; "Des rapports du christianisme avec la doctrine philosophique du progrès," *Revue encyclopédique* 61 (January-March 1835): 77-144.

[638] Pietro Corsi, *The Age of Lamarck: Evolutionary Theories in France 1790-1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); "The Revolutions of Evolution: Geoffroy and Lamarck, 1825-1840," *Bulletin du musée d'anthropologie préhistorique de Monaco* 36, no. 51 (2012): 113-35.

[639] Franck Bourdier, "Le prophète Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Georges Sand et les saint-simoniens," *Histoire et nature* 1 (1973): 50.

scientific synthesis" had paved the way for his own doctrine.[640] Highlighting the affinity between their ideas, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire would himself subsequently praise Leroux as a "profound" thinker whose views on the development of contemporary scientific and philosophical thought were "remarkable and, in certain respects, truly prophetic."[641]

Appealing to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Leroux maintained that "contemporary discoveries" in the fields of anatomy, geology and palaeontology had revealed that the natural order was shaped by the same principle of growth and development. In place of the previous theory of "cataclysms and upheavals," it was now apparent that all life forms were subject to "continuous change."[642] This principle, according to Leroux, could be generalised to account for developments in every realm of reality:

> Take nature or society, contemplate the formation of worlds or the formation of civilisations, dive into the sciences of cosmogony or the depths of history, be a physician or a politician, consider the animal form in the series of its developments or a single animal in its particular life, from the state of a fœtus to its death, the earth in the order of its successive structures or the matter of the stars, in as much as it is possible for is, in our weakness, to pierce the secrets of the heavens, you will always see life developing through unceasing creation and continous progress.[643]

As Leroux described it, all orders of existence, from the natural to the social, and from the collective to the individual, were shaped by the same principle of change and development. In a similar fashion to Fourier, Leroux thus proposed that there was an analogy between these different orders, and that these could be theorised on the basis of a common cosmology. Unlike Fourier, he associated this cosmology not with "passionate attraction," but with gradual and incremental growth or "unceasing creation and continuous progress."

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[640] Leroux, *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*, 66.
[641] Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, *Études progressives d'un naturaliste pendant les années 1834 et 1835* (Paris, 1835) 109-10, n. 1.
[642] Leroux, *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*, 65-66.
[643] Leroux, *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*, 63-64.

This cosmology of progress was the inspiration for Leroux's approach to contemporary reform.[644] If progress was continuous, he argued, then nineteenth-century society was the "inheritor of Christianity," yet it could not return to Christian dogmas. The moral harmonisation of contemporary society, according to Leroux, called for the creation of new religion that would both synthesise and supersede the doctrines of the past.[645] This synthesis, he claimed, could not be "new Christianity," as Saint-Simon had earlier projected, nor could it involve "the renovation of the papacy," as the Saint-Simonians under Enfantin proposed. The Saint-Simonians divided history into "critical" and "organic" periods, Leroux noted, and they mistakenly opposed contemporary "sentiments of liberty and individuality." Moral harmony, in his view, called for a system that brought together elements of the universalism of the Christian faith and the ideals of equality and emancipation of modern philosophy.[646] This system was what Leroux came to call the "religion of humanity."[647]

Leroux's religious doctrine centred on the providential unity of "man" and "humanity," and it stressed the immanent manifestation in every human being of a divine and infinite ideal. For this reason, Leroux maintained that individual perfectibility was not simply individual in nature, but that it was coextensive with the perfection of the collective entity that was "humanity," whose development was the source of the continuous improvement of the human condition.[648] Although this doctrine drew on a variety of sources, from German Idealism to Christian mysticism, Leroux's "religion of humanity" was also inspired by the natural philosophy of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. As John Tresch has suggested, Leroux's conception of "humanity" was a

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[644] Leroux later suggested, in the preface he added to the articles in which he outlined his theory of progress, that this theory was the "basis" and "foundation" of all his later works. *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*, 3.
[645] Leroux, *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*, 101-02.
[646] Leroux also presented his theory of progress as a corrective to the Saint-Simonian distinction between "critical" and "organic periods of history. Leroux, *De la doctrine de la perfectibilité*, 65, 75, 78.
[647] It is worth noting that term "religion of humanity" was first employed by the Saint-Simonians in the early 1830s. More famously, it was also later taken up by Comte. *Religion saint-simonienne. Recueil de predications*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1832), 2:64; Pickering, "Comte and the Saint-Simonians," 232-33
[648] "Humanity is every man in his infinite existence. You are not only a man, you are not an individual, you are humanity. Your individual perfection is therefore the perfection of humanity." Leroux, *De l'humanité de son principe, et de son avenir, où se trouve exposée la vraie définition de la religion*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1840), 1:267.

direct transposition of the concept of "animality" Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire had developed in his works.[649] According to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, different species were the physical manifestation of an abstract being – "animality" – which supplied the common plan behind all animal forms. In a parallel fashion, "humanity" for Leroux was an "ideal being" composed of a multitude of individual physical beings, and finite human existence was dependent upon and connected to a larger virtual entity, which continually developed and progressed over time.

The practical pendant of Leroux's philosophy was the advent of a social order that combined the "religion of humanity" with elements of the principles associated with the French Revolution. Leroux promoted, on the one hand, the virtues of representative government, which he described, echoing Sieyès, as the "permanent and necessary instrument of progress," and he called for the institution of equal rights under the law, including the right to public education. Unlike Sieyès or Condorcet, Leroux nonetheless insisted that property rights had to be constrained by the requirement of an equitable distribution of wealth.[650] He also emphasised that social harmony required religiously inspired principles of cohesion, and notably a trinitarian conception of sovereignty that reconciled the sovereignty of "the people," with the guiding wisdom of the enlightened "few" and the moral autonomy of individual "man." In this way, Leroux projected that it would be possible to sustain true "association" in political society and overcome the antagonism between individualism and socialism.[651] The advent of what he called a "religious democracy" would thus be the culmination of the process of transformation that had begun with the French Revolution, and it would consecrate the principles of "social science."[652]

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649 John Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoléon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 226, 242-43.
650 Leroux, *Trois discours sur la situation actuelle de la société et de l'esprit humain*, in *Œuvres*, 1:107, 146-47.
651 Leroux, *Trois discours sur la situation actuelle*, 163-65. Although Leroux later identified himself as a "socialist," he only did so, he explained, in so far as socialism did not compromise on the notions of "liberty, fraternity, equality and unity," and that it propounded the principles of what he called a "religious democracy." Leroux, "De l'individualisme et du socialisme," 376, n. 1.
652 Leroux, *Trois discours sur la situation actuelle*, 165, 207.

Despite its religious underpinnings, Leroux presented his project of reform as a continuation of the late eighteenth-century search for a science of society. He also looked back to the ideas of revolutionary thinkers in articulating his ideas, and to Sieyès especially. As Leroux observed in a series of remarks dedicated to the thinker, which he would reiterate in the Constituent Assembly in September 1848, Sieyès was one of the few theorists in the 1790s to recognise the need for a new constitution derived neither from Montesquieu's model of monarchy, nor from Rousseau's republican political philosophy. Though Sieyès had long meditated on the principles of such a constitution, Leroux argued that his efforts had been "in vain" because he had not discovered the underlying principle of unity in politics. "Lost in psychology," Sieyès had failed to see that politics needed to be based on the same principles as morality and as the sciences, Leroux suggested, and that this principle had to be a "law of life" that explained both "the essential nature of society" and "history in its entirety."[653] Sieyès, in other words, had mistakenly focused on the analysis of individual faculties, rather than on the universal principles behind the development of every realm of reality. For Leroux, Sieyès had lacked a cosmology of progress.

Buchez's Regenerated Christianity

As previously mentioned, after splitting with the Saint-Simonians, Buchez continued to agitate for reform, and he would promote a similar vision of social and political transformation to Leroux under the July Monarchy. Buchez articulated this vision in *L'Européen* (initially titled *Journal des sciences morales et politiques*), a weekly journal he set up with a group of Saint-Simonian dissenters shortly after the Revolution of 1830. European societies were rife with "egoism," moral "decrepitude" and "political misery," Buchez announced in the first issue of the journal, were divided by the antagonism between the "monied aristocracy" and the labouring classes.[654]

[653] Leroux, *Trois discours sur la situation actuelle*, 246-49; *Projet d'une constitution démocratique et sociale* (Paris, 1848), 91-95.
[654] Buchez, "Introduction," *Journal des sciences morales et politiques*, 1; "Économie politique," 10. On the journal, see Ludovic Frobert and Marie Lauricella, "Naissance de l'association de production. *L'Européen* de Buchez," in *Quand les socialistes inventaient l'avenir*, 75-83.

The remedy to this situation, he argued, required a series of reforms that included the extension of the franchise, a federation of European nations, led by France, and the establishment of more cooperative or "associative" forms of workplace organisation.[655] More fundamentally, Buchez maintained that social stability and harmony was impossible without a uniform system of ideas and belief. Unlike Leroux, Buchez insisted that this system would involve the regeneration of the traditional precepts of the Catholic Church.

Buchez set out the principles of his alternative moral philosophy in a series of articles in the following issues of *L'Européen* in 1831-32. Adapting his earlier approach, Buchez maintained that the "best social form" was now the one that gave the widest scope to "the exercise of free will." This, he argued, required a social order that alleviated as much as possible the "material obstacles" to human liberty, which in practice required equality under the law, public education and improvement in the living conditions of the general population, and of the poor in particular. It also called for the diffusion of a moral doctrine predicated on the dualism of mind and body.[656] Opposing what he considered the "materialism" and "pantheism" of Leroux and the Saint-Simonians, along with the "egoism" of late eighteenth-century moral theory, Buchez maintained that the moral harmonisation of contemporary society had to entail a doctrine committed to the spirituality of the human soul, the freedom of the will and individual "devotion" or "sacrifice" to common well-being.[657] Those principles aligned with the traditional

[655] [Buchez], "De la France," *Journal des sciences morales et politiques* 1, no. 1 (3 December 1831), 3; "Plan d'un système de politique positive applicable au temps présent," pt. 2, *L'Européen* 1, no. 17 (24 March 1832): 259; "Du principe d'association et des associations partielles," *L'Européen* 1, no. 46 (20 October 1832): 307-09.
[656] [Buchez], "De la liberté et du libre arbitre," pt. 2, *L'Européen* 1, no. 21 (21 April 1832): 321-24.
[657] [Buchez], "De la morale," *L'Européen* 1, no. 16 (17 March 1832): 244-47; "De la liberté et du libre arbitre," pt. 1, *L'Européen* 1, no. 20 (14 April 1832): 305-07. For the critique of Leroux and the Saint-Simonians, see [Prosper-Charles Roux] Compte rendu, Jules Lechevalier, *Lettre aux St-Simoniens sur la division survenue dans l'association St-Simonienne*, *L'Européen* 1, no. 7 (14 January 1832): 111-112; [Buchez], "De la philosophie et du christianisme," *L'Européen* 1, no. 46 (20 October 1832): 316-17. See also Buchez, *Essai d'un traité complet de philosophie, du point de vue du catholicisme et du progrès*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1838-40), vol. 2 (1839), 314-23. On the Maistrian affinities of Buchez's later thought, see Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 296-98.

precepts of the Catholic Church, he argued, and they had found their most recent expression during the French Revolution.[658]

Although it diverged from the approach he had advanced in *Le Producteur*, Buchez continued to present his project of reform as the product of a "positive" conception of society. Despite his newfound emphasis on human spirituality, Buchez was still concerned with the plight of the poor, and he promoted a set of improvements that followed the three axes of progress he had previously identified as part of his social physiology – the production of goods, the diffusion of knowledge and the articulation of a common moral doctrine. He also remained invested in the establishment of new system of public "hygiene" that would address, as he described it, "the health of the social masses."[659] Buchez, however, no longer called for the institution of a "cult" celebrating science and industry, and he proposed instead a regenerated Christianity, which he conceived not as a social religion, in the model of Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme*, but as a spiritual system of faith and belief. In *L'Européen*, Buchez also insisted that his approach now derived from a "theory of the universal order," and that according to this theory progress was not simply a feature of human society, it was a "general law" that governed the entire "planetary system."[660]

Although they diverged in content, Buchez sought to legitimate the principles of his religious doctrine on the basis a vast and expansive cosmology of progress, in an equivalent manner to Leroux. This cosmology, which he first developed in *Introduction à la science de l'histoire, ou Science du développement de l'humanité* (1833), had two parts.[661] The first centred on the claim that the development of human society was defined by a succession of "logical ages." Adapting the

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[658] [Buchez], "Mouvement politique," *Journal des sciences morales et politiques* 1, no. 4 (24 December 1831): 54-56.
[659] [Buchez], "De l'hygiène," p. 1, *L'Européen* 1, no. 9 (28 January 1832): 135.
[660] [Buchez], "Plan d'un système de politique positive," pt. 1, *L'Européen* 1, no. 16 (17 March 1832): 242.
[661] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire, ou Science du développement de l'humanité* (Paris, 1833). It is worth noting that the composition of this work appears to have been motivated by the criticism, made in Leroux's *Revue encyclopédique*, that Buchez had not set out a systematic theory to justify the proposals for reform he put forward in *L'Européen*. [Buchez], Variétés, *L'Européen* 1, no. 15 (10 March 1832): 240; "Plan d'un système politique positive," pt. 1, 242.

philosophy of history he had put forward in *Le Producteur*, Buchez maintained that every logical age included three phases: a synthetic phase, defined by the revelation "of a common goal of activity," an intermediary phase, characterised by "smaller and smaller syntheses," and an analytical phase, in which "individualism" took hold. This last phase, he also suggested, could be succeeded by a return to the "synthetic" principles of the first phase and, thus, to a return to the state of moral and intellectual harmony that those principles supplied.[662] The second part of Buchez's cosmology expanded on these claims. In tune with his remarks in *L'Européen*, its premise was that the course of human history was determined by a "higher" and "universal" law of progress.[663]

Like Leroux, Buchez insisted that a single and uniform principle governed processes of change and development in every realm of reality, and he derived this principle from an interpretation of contemporary natural science. While Leroux was inspired by the evolutionary theory of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, however, Buchez drew on the "fixist" conceptions of Georges Cuvier.[664] A prominent figure of the scientific establishment under the Restoration, Cuvier opposed Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's evolutionary theory, and he maintained that the animal kingdom was divided into four distinct and unrelated branches that had been fixed by God. He also promoted the view that the natural order was subject to perennial "cataclysms," and that these explained the birth and demise of the different life forms that could be observed in the study of fossil remains.[665] As is well known, Cuvier engaged in a well-publicised debate with Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire in 1830, and the two naturalists expounded their respective approaches in lectures delivered over the

[662] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1833), 207-20, 228-29.
[663] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1833), 13.
[664] For his critique of the philosophical implications of the theory of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and of Leroux's use of this theory, see Buchez, *Introduction à l'étude des sciences médicales* (Paris, 1838), 56-64, 142-54.
[665] On Cuvier's natural theory and its context, see Corsi, *Age of Lamarck*, 231-64.

course of several months at the Académie des sciences.[666] Less well known is that this debate would find a sequel in the divergent cosmologies of progress of Leroux and Buchez.

In contradistinction to Leroux, Buchez insisted that the universal law of progress was that the emergence of every new form of life involved a clear and absolute break with the previous form. Citing contemporary study in the fields of geology, comparative anatomy and embryogeny, and with specific reference to the fossil analyses of Cuvier, Buchez argued that all developments, whether in the material or spiritual realm, the animal or social order, were characterised by a series of changes that were separated by "great cataclysms."[667] The development of human society was determined by a principle of "spiritual progression" akin to the set of developments that presided over natural phenomena, he maintained, and the emergence of a new logical age was, "like geological formations," always "abrupt" and "completely independent of the one that preceded and the one that followed it."[668] According to Buchez, the progress of human society was therefore not continuous, as Leroux maintained, it was determined by the series of revelations, or syntheses, given to humanity by God. Humanity was thus governed by a "beneficent" law of progress, of which its existence was but a "function."[669]

Buchez appealed to this conception of progress to justify his vision of contemporary moral regeneration. As he explained in the second edition of *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1842), humanity had witnessed four successive revelations, and these had spurred four distinct periods of human history: the antediluvian revelation of Adam, which gave human beings language, law and morality; the revelation of Noah, which set in motion the great propagation of humanity on earth; the revelation of Abraham, in which a new belief in human spirituality had arisen along

[666] Dorinda Outram, *Georges Cuvier. Vocation, Science and Authority in Post-Revolutionary France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Toby A. Appel, *The Cuvier-Geoffrey Debate: French Biology in the Decades before Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
[667] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1833), 112, 411-21, 450, n. 1 (for the reference to Cuvier).
[668] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1833), 456-57.
[669] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1833), 113.

with new forms of social and religious hierarchy; and finally, the revelation brought by Jesus Christ, in which the idea of human spiritual equality had emerged.[670] Although it had already transitioned through several of its phases, contemporary society remained in the Christian age, according to Buchez, and the last stage in its development would see the "realisation of the doctrine brought by Jesus" through the "reign of association."[671] This, he argued, would involve the regeneration of the Catholic Church and the unification of European spiritual and temporal powers around the principles of equality, fraternity and what he called "Christian justice."[672]

Although Buchez did not describe it in this way, this approach can be said to have effected its own synthesis of individualism and socialism, as Leroux had defined them. While he emphasised the pre-determined nature of progress, Buchez insisted that individuals were endowed with free will, and that the purpose of society was the development of human liberty.[673] In light of contemporary inequities, it was nonetheless necessary to transform economic relations in society, he argued, and further the interests of the working classes. To counter selfish tendencies, Buchez also claimed that it was necessary to establish a uniform system of morality promoting equality and fraternity, as well as devotion and sacrifice. Buchez's combined concern with individual autonomy and moral unity may not have generated an entirely consistent system, but it paralleled Leroux's efforts to reconcile a project of holistic social reform with the political principles of the late eighteenth century. Neither Leroux nor Buchez, however, sought to return to a model of human improvement derived from an analysis of individual faculties, and they both predicated

[670] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire, ou science du développement de l'humanité*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Guillaumin, 1842), 2:253-317.
[671] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1833), 568.
[672] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1842), 2:506-09.
[673] Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1833), 113-21. In a later work, Buchez insisted that although society had to reject all forms of "egoism," it needed to embrace "individualism," in so far as it was the "simple and legitimate expression of [man's] nature, faculties, needs, that is to say, his rights." Buchez, *Traité de politique et de science sociale*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1866), 1:234-37, 411.

their approaches on cosmologies of progress that combined Saint-Simon's providential vision of historical change with concepts inspired by the natural scientific theories of their day.

Leroux and Buchez were not the most central figures of early French socialism, but they each played an important role in shaping the movement of opposition under the July Monarchy. Following his participation in *Revue encyclopédie* and other periodicals, Leroux established a small intentional community in Boussac (Creuse) in the early 1840s. Leroux created an independent printing press in the town and published a series of widely-read journals.[674] After the publication of the first edition of *Introduction à la science de l'histoire*, Buchez composed a monumental forty-volume history of the French Revolution (1834-38), in collaboration with Pierre-Célestin Roux-Lavergne, before returning to elaborate the principles of his neo-Catholic doctrine.[675] Buchez also helped to found the influential artisan-owned newspaper *L'Atelier* (1840-50), while his philosophy inspired the emergence of a significant movement of social art in nineteenth-century France.[676] Although Leroux and Buchez became actively involved in politics after the Revolution of 1848 – they were both elected to the newly established legislative assembly – neither was able to garner support for their visions of moral and political regeneration.[677] As Sieyès and the Idéologues had found, the ideals of social science were difficult to implement in practice. Never more than when faced with the pretensions of an aspiring Bonaparte.

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[674] Leroux notably edited the *Revue indépendante* (1841-48), with the help of the famed novelist Georges Sand, as well as *Revue sociale, ou Solution pacifique du problème du proletariat* (1845-50).
[675] These works included the three-volume *Essai d'un traité complet de philosophie, du point de vue du catholicisme et du progrès* (1838-40) and the second edition of *Introduction à la science de l'histoire* (1842), expanded to two volumes.
[676] Neil McWilliam, "Sentiment and Faith: Philippe Buchez and His Circle," chap. 5 in *Dreams of Happiness: Social Art and the French Left, 1830-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[677] Buchez was elected the first president of the Constituent Assembly in May 1848, but his inefficacy in dealing with the insurrection of 15 May undermined his authority, while the abstract and philosophical arguments Leroux put forward in the chamber drew derision from his parliamentary colleagues. See Leroux, *Projet d'une constitution démocratique et sociale*.

Conclusion

The philosophies of progress that flourished under the July Monarchy reflected the drawn-out process of discussion and debate that had unfolded in the search for a science of society before, during and after the French Revolution. This process, I have argued in this thesis, was defined in crucial and hitherto unrecognised ways by the transition from individual to collective models of improvement. In the second half of the eighteenth century, theorists premised their understanding of morality and politics on an analysis of the faculties and abilities of individuals, natural or acquired, and they typically regarded the attributes of individual perfectibility as a key component and mechanism of wider social betterment. This study has shown that these investigations were carried out in the space between Rousseau's critique of modern society and the Physiocrats' attempt to regenerate the French monarchy, and that they were informed, explicitly and implicitly, by the philosophies of Helvétius and d'Holbach. Against this intellectual background, this study has uncovered the range of discrete models of improvement at the heart of successive attempts to develop a science of society at this time of intense social and political upheaval in France.

The analytical starting point of French social science in the late eighteenth century, I contend, was the individual, and its focus was the properties of perfectibility and the range of capacities individuals could acquire to further a more equitable social order. Sieyès and Condorcet, the first to publicise this science in their works, set out alternative approaches to these questions. The first emphasised the need to harmonise naturally divergent individual needs and interests through the expansion of the division of labour, both in society and in the institutions of government. The second stressed the potential for convergence of human capacities through the diffusion of knowledge and the cultivation of the moral sentiments that individuals acquired in the family. A further set of contrasts distinguished the views of the Idéologues Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis, who took up the project of a science of society after the Terror. As I showed,

Destutt de Tracy advanced a primarily intellectual conception of perfectibility, focused on the cultivation of good judgement, and he stressed the importance of leadership by a scientific elite in society. Despite his emphasis on human difference, and particularly sexual difference, Cabanis, in contrast, promoted moral and physical perfectibility and suggested that individual abilities could to a certain extent be made to converge through hygienic reform.

These different approaches had long and enduring legacies in early French social science. Following the critique of the discourse of perfectibility at the turn of the nineteenth century, later theorists nonetheless moved away from a focus on the individual and came to place greater emphasis on the collective levers of social improvement. Drawing on the ideas of the Theocrats, Saint-Simon formulated visions of progress that combined an attention to social stability, scientific unity and moral cohesion. Unlike the thinkers of the 1790s, he also became increasingly concerned with the underlying processes and principles behind the development of society over time. Having initially revived a cyclical theory of progress and decline, he came to argue that social progress was driven by a providential law of civilisation. This new approach brought together Condorcet's future-oriented philosophy of history with Sieyès' emphasis on the division of labour, by way of Maistrian aetiology and liberal ideas of political economy. The philosophies subsequently developed by Saint-Simon's followers reiterated the set of contrasts that had typified late eighteenth-century social science. Those philosophies were now shaped, however, by evaluations of what those thinkers considered to be the features and attributes of the collective processes that impelled social improvement – science, industry and religion.

This thesis has traced the range of ideas and approaches that characterised the search for a science of society in France in the period 1750-1850 and underlined their conceptual variety. It has brought to light the array of sources that informed this search, from Leibnizian metaphysics to vitalist medicine, from studies of the origins of language to histories of the first societies, from evolutionary theories of nature to counter-revolutionary thought. There is no denying the

instrumental uses to which those sources were sometimes put, or the unusual and contradictory positions that they were occasionally taken to support. The inspiration they provided nonetheless underscores the efforts of the thinkers examined in this study to connect their various perspectives to a broader set of contemporary ideas, as well as to base them on what they believed to be secure epistemological foundations. Whether those sources were used to explain human variability or the potential for equality in society, the supposed hierarchy of human "races" or the universal attributes of a common humanity, the need for religion in society or the obstacle it posed to human improvement, they highlight that French social science was embedded in wider attempts to construct and validate different forms of knowledge, scientific, philosophical and theological.

For many of the thinkers discussed in this thesis, a science of society was not only seen as a guide for improvement, its advent was also conceived as the pinnacle of scientific progress. If Mirabeau *père*, the first to employ the term in print, linked *la science sociale* to the decadence of European society, Condorcet presented the emergence of a probabilistic social science as the outcome of the centuries-long development of knowledge. Although Condorcet's "social mathematics" did not inspire the theorists examined in this study, a number of them would continue to see the project of a science of society as the apotheosis of rational progress. This project thus became shaped by a set of overlapping arguments about the perfectibility of mind, the development of science and the improvement of society. The tension between Condorcet's democratic aspirations and his more elitist conception of knowledge-production nonetheless set the scene for recurring debates between the proponents of a science of society in France. The nature of the relationship between the leadership of the few and the emancipation of the many was, as I have shown, a central point of contention in the works of the theorists who succeeded Condorcet.

Historians have long been aware of the late eighteenth-century origins of French positivism and early socialism. This thesis has nonetheless tracked, in a more precise and detailed fashion than previous studies, the legacies of French revolutionary approaches in shaping those strands of thought. Despite their emphasis on moral unity, a set of previously unexamined positivist theories were conceived with reference to the philosophies of the 1790s, and their exponents sought to extend the gains, if not the policies, of the French Revolution. Early socialists more explicitly revived a republican discourse of individual rights and equality. Typically, however, they embedded their approaches in expansive cosmologies of progress. In contrast to earlier theorists, they did not take the individual as their starting point, nor did they present the development of individual faculties as the primary mechanism of social advancement. Early French socialism thus emerged out of an attempt to resurrect principles once associated with individual models of improvement and to reframe these as the product of the underlying forces behind the development of human society, if not of the cosmos itself. However implausible, this attempt is proof of the all-important concern of nineteenth-century theorists with harmonising society by stabilising contemporary understandings of progress.

This thesis has also traced, in a more sustained way than previous scholarship, the vicissitudes of the religious question in the development of early French social science. In the world of the *ancien régime*, the Physiocrats promoted their vision of a happy and prosperous society by invoking God's providential design. Rejecting the orthodoxies of the Church, the revolutionary theorists examined in this thesis then sought alternative means of cultivating human morality, through education, a well-ordered system of interest management or the consistent application of laws. Their post-revolutionary successors, meanwhile, were adamant that society could not do without a uniform mode of belief, whether derived from science, Christianity or some other religious doctrine. These theorists nonetheless predicated this view on a series of claims about the spiritual development of humanity and the necessary, and preordained, characteristics of the

religious system suited to modern society. Rather than returning to traditional notions of sin and salvation, those theorists also promoted world-transforming creeds, and they conjured up programmes of reform which sought to realise, to borrow Saint-Simon's words, "paradise on earth." In this iteration, the struggle between Athens and Jerusalem, or reason and revelation, was obviated by the great and fantastical futures promised by the beneficent hand of progress.[678]

A complete picture of the models of improvement underpinning early French social science would require further research. Several areas, in particular, would benefit from additional study. These include the broader history of this project in the 1790s, as well as the range of new conceptions of social science articulated, under the July Monarchy, by theorists variously drawing on the works of Saint-Simon and Fourier. Although I have discussed the ideas of the major figures of both nineteenth-century liberal political economy and counter-revolutionary thought, a fuller account would call for more extensive examination of the philosophies of the Doctrinaires – the group of reformers who sought a middle ground between revolution and conservative government in early nineteenth-century France – as well as of those of religious traditionalists. Two other areas have been unjustly neglected: the reception of Scottish and German philosophies of history and the enduring concern, of a range of theorists examined in this thesis, with the relationship between moral, intellectual and aesthetic progress. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides the outlines of a new history of early French social science, of its origins, development and legacy, over the course of a tumultuous and epoch-defining century.

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The Revolution of 1848 and its aftermath consolidated the trends identified in this thesis. The advent of the Second Republic, and the policies it introduced, was a source of hope to many of

[678] For the classic account of this struggle, see Leo Strauss, "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Introductory Reflections," *Commentary* 43, no. 6 (Jun., 1967): 45-57.

the reformers discussed in chapter five. The rise to power of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte quashed those hopes, however, and the coup d'état of 1851 and the later creation of the Second Empire thwarted the prospects for the emancipation of both workers and women.[679] This setback did not lessen the faith in progress of Saint-Simon's disparate band of followers, but it contributed to the further demise of the models of human improvement once associated with the concept of perfectibility. Driven by a new desire for spiritual regeneration, Comte established a "religion of humanity" with progress as one of its main tenets.[680] The once high priest of the Saint-Simonian Church, Enfantin, revived his theory of universal harmony and promoted his particular vision of social reorganisation as "the inevitable product of the law of the progressive development of humanity."[681] Leroux, now in exile in Jersey, retraced the history of religion and modern philosophy to show that society was on the cusp of a "new phase" in its unfolding process of "revelation."[682]

The move away from the revolutionary discourse of perfectibility was solidified by the flurry of works that took the idea of progress as their focus from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. These works typically combined broad-brush accounts of the history of this idea with a series of claims about the principles, or laws, that underlie the development of human society over time. The concept of perfectibility in those works was usually mentioned only in reference to Condorcet, if at all.[683] When the concept was employed, outside of texts within a Christian idiom,

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[679] Although some of Saint-Simon's followers rallied to Napoléon III, whom they saw as an agent of modernisation, many continued to agitate for reform, at home or abroad. Michèle Riot-Sarcey, "1848: des saint-simoniens dans le movement," *Études saint-simoniennes*, eds. Philippe Régnier (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2002), 93-109. On the Revolution of 1848 and its aftermath, see Maurice Agulhon, *1848, ou l'apprentissage de la République, 1848-1852* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975); Christopher Guyver, *The Second French Republic, 1848-1852: A Political Reinterpretation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); François Furet, "The Second Empire: 1851-1870," chap. 9 in *Revolutionary France 1770-1880* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

[680] On the origins and development of Comte's "religion of humanity," see Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, vols. 2-3.

[681] Prosper Enfantin, *Science de l'homme. Physiologie religieuse* (Paris, 1858), 95.

[682] Leroux, *Cours de phrénologie* [1853], ed. Armelle Le Bras-Chopard (Geneva: Slatkine, 1995), 16.

[683] See, among others, Javary, *L'idée de progrès*; Eugène Pelletan, *Profession de foi du XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1852); Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Philosophie du progrès* (Bruxelles, 1853); Jean Joseph Thonissen, *Quelques considérations sur la théorie du progrès indéfini dans ses rapports avec l'histoire de la civilisation et les dogmes du christianisme* (Paris, 1860); Henri de Ferron, *Théorie du progrès*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1867).

it was in the context of anthropological and sociological discussions of racial and civilisational advancement.[684] In the wake of Darwin's theory of evolution, and building on long-running European anxieties about physical and moral health in modern polities, those discussions also became increasingly concerned with human degeneration, rather than perfection, and they came to be associated with projects of eugenic control, rather than individual enlightenment.[685] Continuing the move initiated by Saint-Simon at the turn of the nineteenth century, the concept of perfectibility and the range of improvements it had once been taken to engender became divorced from its association with moral and political renewal and, indeed, from social science.

The measure of this transformation can be illustrated by turning to Buchez's last work, *Traité de politique et de science sociale*, published posthumously in 1866. As Buchez explained, certain thinkers had earlier claimed that progress simply consisted in the perfection of individual faculties. No assertion was "more false," he declared. Although individuals had a capacity for improvement, this capacity was entirely dependent upon the state of society, he argued, whose degree of moral, scientific and economic advancement determined the faculties and capacities each individual acquired. Society and politics followed a pre-determined "law of progress," according to Buchez, and were "destined to march forward" and in a "straight line" towards better days. In line with his claims in earlier works, he also insisted that this law did not simply operate in the human realm, but that it characterised "the universal order" created by God and governed everything from the formation of planets to the generation of animal species.[686] As Buchez's friend and associate Auguste Ott explained, thinkers had long "confused the idea of progress with that of

[684] Paul Broca, *Mémoires d'anthropologie de Paul Broca*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1871-88), vol. 1 (1871), 32-34; Charles Mismer, *Principes sociologiques* (Paris, 1898), 165-66. See, however, Alexandre Piola, *La Connexité économique ou l'utilité progressive* (Paris, 1875), 59-63.
[685] Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[686] Buchez, *Traité de politique et de science sociale*, 1:32-40.

perfectibility," but it was now obvious that the latter was entirely "secondary" to the former and thus "insufficient" and "impossible" without it.[687]

Despite continued efforts to articulate a science of society in a Saint-Simonian framework, the mid-nineteenth century would also see the gradual disaggregation of the moral, political and scientific conceptions that once held this framework together. More militant and secular strands of socialism rose to prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century, on the back of Marxian theories of political economy, and displaced more spiritual and harmony-oriented approaches.[688] Although some of Saint-Simon's followers shaped political and economic developments under the Second Empire and helped to lay the intellectual foundations of the Third Republic, the rise of national sentiments in Europe also undermined the pacifist and internationalist aspirations of this group of reformers.[689] The institutionalisation of sociology as a discipline in the late nineteenth century, finally, consecrated Comte's vision of this science as an autonomous and distinct branch of knowledge. Whatever its debts to Comte, however, Émile Durkheim's *sociologie* was conceived to bolster and legitimise the institutions of the Third Republic, and it became divorced from the aspiration to envision an alternative future.[690] The search for a science of society was not over, but its original end – the sweeping transformation of the existing human order – was largely abandoned.

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[687] Auguste Ott, "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de Buchez," in Buchez, *Traité de politique et de science sociale*, 1:lxiv; "Perfectibilité," *Encyclopédie du dix-neuvième siècle. Répertoire universel des sciences, des lettres et des arts* (Paris, 1870), 18:67-68.
[688] Stedman-Jones, "European Socialism from the 1790s to the 1890s," 214-31.
[689] For some examples of Saint-Simonian involvement in politics in this period, see Sudhir Hazareesingh, "A Republican Saint-Simonian: Eugène Pelletan and the Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Republicanism," chap. 4 in *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Republican Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Michael Drolet, "Nature, Science and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century French Political Economy: The Case of Michel Chevalier (1805-1879)," *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2018): 711-45.
[690] Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 231-32; Heilbron, *French Sociology*, 73-89.

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