

Religion and Political Economy in Early 19th Century France*

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1. Introduction

There was in early 19th century France a widespread revival of religious sentiment, following the turmoil of the Revolution and the intellectual onslaught upon religion so central to the French Enlightenment. Simultaneously, political economy became more prominent among publicists and political *élites*. These two developments greatly influenced those who sought to further a modern, post-revolutionary society, and who in their different ways expressed a new approach to economics and politics known as *industrialisme*. These writers put forward several versions of the links that should exist in industrial society between political economy and religion. Are political economy and religion necessarily in conflict? Or were they rather complementary; and if so, what was the nature of this complementarity? This paper examines the issues at stake and responses to them. Our analysis entails the following steps.

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We first note that a truly a-religious political economy based on self-interested behaviour and utilitarianism, such as the one presented in Jean-Baptiste Say's *Traité d'économie politique* and in his *Catéchisme d'économie politique*,³ gained acceptance and became the point of reference for most people interested in the “new” science — a form of political economy belonging to what we labeled *Philosophie économique* (Faccarello and Steiner 2004, 2008). From the 1820s onward this approach was also developed by Charles Comte and Charles Dunoyer. In the following, we emphasise how deeply political economy and utilitarianism merged in Say's works — especially when he broadened the field of his inquiry in the opening pages of the *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique*. This point of departure is important not only because Say's thought became a major reference for the different conceptions of *industrialisme*, but also because it provided a utilitarian evaluation of religious institutions and feelings (§2: “Say and the Sayards: utility and political economy against religious errors”).

Next, we notice that some conceptions of *industrialisme* — criticising various aspects of the *industrialisme* of Say and his followers — can be found in the writings of the leading members of two distinct schools of thought, very active and influential in France either during Say's lifetime or immediately after his death: firstly, the *Groupe de Coppet*, with Germaine de Staël and Benjamin Constant; and secondly, the less homogeneous group formed by Claude-Henri Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians and Auguste Comte. Both approaches presumed that self-interest was incapable of uniting the social body, and placed much emphasis on religious feelings in explaining how societies could function harmoniously.⁴

Religion was thus once again thought to be a central institution in a modern society. It is important however to distinguish carefully the position of Staël, Constant, Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte from that of the reactionary or traditionalist philosophers of the time like Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald or Pierre-Simon Ballanche. For these latter writers the return to religious values meant the revocation of almost all those

³ “Catechisms” are books in which a doctrine — usually a religious doctrine — is set out as a series of questions and answers; these were common among the writers with whom we are dealing: Saint-Simon and A. Comte wrote a *Catéchisme des industriels*; and, finally, Auguste Comte wrote a lengthy *Catéchisme positiviste* directed to the diffusion of his new religion.

⁴ Later on, a similar problem was raised in the United States, with however answers involving different possible links between interest, reason and the passions: see Davenport (2008).

philosophical ideas developed during the Enlightenment⁵ and, at the institutional level, either the restoration of a pre-revolutionary political order and the traditional power of the Catholic Church; or the establishment of a kind of theocracy in which the Catholic Church and the Pope would have played a prominent role.⁶ Unlike them, our authors claimed a strong attachment to the tradition of the *philosophes*, and felt deeply committed to the main progressive ideas developed by their predecessors — first and foremost Condorcet. They considered themselves to be in some respects their heirs, whose task was to develop their legacy as a social and political philosophy for a new society, following the sometimes unhappy and terrible events of the Revolution.

But while our authors regarded religion as fundamental to modern society, the way in which they reintroduced it differed greatly from case to case, as did their understanding of the links between religion and political economy.⁷

Here we first examine how Staël and Constant dealt with these issues and how, while accepting the principle of competition in economic activity, their conception of the specific nature of liberty in a modern society led them into a critique of utilitarianism and morals based on interest; and also to the idea that the harmonious functioning of the industrial society requires a morality based upon religion (§3: “Staël and Constant: Religion and the Liberal Strand of Industrialism”).

We then study how *industrialisme* was modified to fit the views of modern society held by Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians, and Auguste Comte. Political and civil liberty was not a central matter for these writers. Instead, they rather favoured the creation of economic and political organisations capable of regulating a chaotic social order; and in this perspective new forms of religion were given a prominent place, specifically formed to suit the industrial social order and based on philanthropy or altruism.⁸ the New

⁵ In particular the emancipation of the human mind, and the ability of human beings to think and to freely organize the economic and political society they are living in.

⁶ These authors also took into account some economic problems in order to reassess the supremacy of religion over material wealth (Bonald 1819: 584-96; see also Epsztein 1966: 105-112).

⁷ We focus here on the industrialist current of thought: we thus neglect some other authors like, e.g., Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont and his *Économie politique chrétienne* (1834). On Villeneuve-Bargemont and some other Catholic writers of the period, see Almodovar and Teixeira (2008).

⁸ The debate on political economy and religion thus assumed in Great Britain a totally different aspect during the same period (see Waterman 1991 and 2008).

Christianity of Saint Simon and the Religion of Humanity of A. Comte (§4: “Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians and A. Comte: the Organisational Strand of Industrialism”).

Finally, we cannot neglect the fact that, after all such criticism, some leading liberal economists during the 1840’s and 50’s reacted in defence of political economy and developed their own conceptions of the links between economics and religion. In particular they rejected the idea of the necessity of a new religion and insisted instead on traditional Catholic ideas. But then political economy and religion were conceived as two pillars of a conservative order following the rise of socialist ideas. In the concluding section we briefly summarize how this reaction was reflected in the ideas of Charles Dunoyer, Frédéric Bastiat and Michel Chevalier (§5: “Conclusion: Political Economy in an Age of Religious Revival”).

2. Say and the Sayards: Utility and Political Economy against Religious Error

Jean Baptiste Say

Utilitarianism developed in eighteenth-century France with a strong anti-religious sentiment (Helvétius 1758, 1773; d’Holbach 1770, 1773). During the French Revolution, as a consequence of the political problems associated with natural law, utilitarianism became prominent in the work of the Idéologues. Among them, was Say, who wrote as follows to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours:

For some time I have been of the opinion that men, by engaging with society, renounce one part of their rights to secure the other; following this, I was of the opinion that the social condition lent them greater rights; now I am no longer so certain that they have rights and I recognise only facts: I can see rights only where there is an effective pleasure. (Say to Dupont de Nemours, June 23rd, 1814; Eleutherian Mills Historical Library, W2-4131).

The high esteem in which Say held Bentham’s thought never altered, and the utilitarian approach remained central for his political economy. This is demonstrated by

two episodes where morals and religion are confronted with utilitarianism and political economy⁹.

The first episode concerns Say's book on morals and sociability: *Petit volume contenant quelques aperçus des hommes et de la société* (Say 1817), in which he asserted the importance of utilitarianism for the conduct of life in modern industrial society. Other forms of conduct supposedly resulted from vanity, error or sheer ignorance of the true principles ruling social life. Vanity appeared to him the most dangerous:

Moral philosophers seem to believe that self-love, interest, directs the actions of men more than self-importance, or vanity. I believe, on the contrary, that vanity has more power over them, generally speaking, than self-love. It suffices to observe how many times men act out of vanity in a way that is contrary to their interests... (Say 1817: 83).

The correct response to such a situation is consistent self-interested behaviour:

You complain that each pays attention only to his own interest; I am afflicted with the opposite. To know one's true interests is the beginning of wisdom; having the courage to follow them is the complement. (*ibid.*: 84).

The second episode relates to the composition of the book written on the basis of the lectures Say gave at the Conservatoire Royal des Arts et Métiers from 1819 to the end of his life. He asked his friend Dumont to write a piece on utilitarianism for addition as an appendix to the last volume of the *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique*. This was an unusual move from an author who neither wrote nor printed anything jointly: what might explain this request? Say tried to write the piece by himself — two lectures given in 1819 in the Athénée were the basis for his draft chapter; but he was not satisfied with the result (Say to Dumont, March 5th, 1829 in Say 1833: 362). But this does confirm that Say considered utilitarianism to be the real foundation of his political economy. An undated manuscript states quite clearly:

⁹ In a note dedicated to his wife and children about what should be done with his papers after his death, Say explained that besides a book on politics (*Essais de politique pratique*) and a book on morals (*Essais de morale pratique*), he had planned a book on religion (*Traité de l'utilité morale des religions*) (Say Mss: F379-1).

Write a little book entitled *On the Principle of Utility*, or simply *On Utility*. First of all I will define utility in its most extensive sense, *its capacity to serve man*. Many examples. I will show that for men, caring for themselves, everything that does not have utility as an aim is ignorance, ill-conceived interest, insanity. That to lead men back to the principle of utility is to bring them back to healthy use of their reason and to their greater happiness. Application to politics, political economy, to all sciences and arts. To publish only after my other works. It will be the key. (Say Mss: G385).

In this light the correspondence between Say and Dumont is most helpful in understanding how, and by whom, *Philosophie économique* was attacked:

Utility has no other foes than the two troops of sophistries that Bentham unites under the banners of *asceticism* and the *arbitrary* or *sentiment*; and it seems to me possible to render intelligible in one of these categories all the objections that are today raised against an eminently beneficial and social principle [...] the attacks are vague, verbal, lost in periodicals and not specialised works. Without having read all of Benjamin Constant's book on religions, I have seen there attacks of this kind. And in the work of Madam de Staël on Germany. And in *Corinne* by the same author, Book V, Chapter 1 and in Book IX, Chapter 5 ("Oh! How I love uselessness! etc"). [...] Necker, in Chapter 1 of his *Opinions religieuses*, does not directly attack the principle of utility; but he believes that it has no practical application, and that man can only be constrained by force to act for the good of society, or by hell, which is another species of force. (Say to Dumont, May 10th, 1829, in Say 1833: 366-7).

Dumont finally wrote to Say stating that he did not feel himself capable of the complex work of refutation necessary to answer the statements of the growing anti-utilitarian movement (Dumont to Say, July 21st, 1829, in Say 1833: 372), and Say's essay on utilitarianism was published posthumously by Charles Comte (Say 1833: 406-55; now in Say 2003a: 130-54).

However, a previous response to a critique which favoured religious argument makes clear that Say did not wish to leave such criticism unanswered. This appeared in the first volume of the *Cours complet* where Say answered Jean-Denis Lanjuinais' assertion that political economy, because of its orientation toward material well-being, prevented men from considering their salvation. Say pointed out that political economy as a science had precise boundaries, and could not be accused of neglecting the next life. (Say 1828-9, I: 99). But he also emphasised that political economy did not limit itself to material wealth; and that in his book he was broadening his definition of the science precisely so that he might deal with the entire social system (*ibid.* 7). As soon as men endow goods, services, institutions or virtues with exchange value, Say argued, they can be supposed to fall within the province of political economy (*ibid.* 100). The same issue recurs in his personal papers, expressed with some heat, for Say suggested religious institutions might be subjected to utilitarian evaluation.

But, some assert, political economy regards the costs of worship to be a mistaken expenditure ... Listen: yes, if worship is false, if it does not give to man the benefits that it promises him. But if because of religion all men live as brothers, if they never wrong one another, if they do not torment themselves with the spirit of proselytism, if they are not subjected to dogmas or practices which degrade the soundness of their minds, their well-being, then in truth, political economy informs them of the disadvantage in subscribing to a harmful institution as if it were useful, but does not prescribe anything; on the contrary, it counsels them to make all necessary sacrifice to build good institutions, just as it counsels them to be just, equitable and benevolent towards each and all, and to respect the rights and properties of each, for their own interest directs them to do so. Its counsel is thus extremely favourable to the good of humanity, and state nothing contrary to hopes which go beyond this life. (Say Mss: F378-103).

Say was being ironical: he did not believe that any religion could be considered free from dogmatism, proselytism, persecution, and so forth. Furthermore, the manuscripts show that he was inclined to utilitarian assessment of religion: whatever their doctrinal

content, the truth of a religion lay, for him, in the manner in which it promoted peaceful social life. Finally, in some unpublished notes which form the first steps of a chapter on the political usefulness of religions (Say 2003b: 515-32), Say acknowledged the existence of a religious sentiment specific to human beings (*ibid.* 515-6); however, contrary to Constant, he asserted that this sentiment resulted from the intellectual faculty of generalisation: when this faculty was pushed too far, then men were prone to believe there to be a general cause motivating the whole world. This feeling was nothing but the mark of the limitation of the human mind, to which Say added the effects derived from natural propensities such as fear, love, sociability, the habits of subordination and a credulous belief in fantastical and marvellous stories.

Charles Comte

Say died in November 1832, three years after the publication of the last volume of the *Cours complet*. Was his perspective also passing away, or was there still life in it? Generally speaking, the French liberal school was not convinced of the merits of Bentham's thought, principally because utilitarianism considered property to be a political outcome — that is to say, an institution that could be modified according to the utilitarian principle — and not a natural right with which government should never interfere. Nevertheless, a small number of economists and writers endorsed the utilitarian principle, as Say had done in his own time. Central here were Charles Comte and Dunoyer¹⁰, since they were both personally acquainted with Say, and because Dunoyer became an important author, to whom we shall return in the concluding section of this paper.

Charles Comte published a book in four volumes on legislation in which he sought to implement in the science of legislation what had already been done in political economy — to discover the laws according to which nations improve or decay (C. Comte 1826: I: 11). His approach ran counter to speculative legislation such as that of natural jurisprudence and Rousseau's writings. Adopting the principle of utility, Charles Comte also criticised those religious thinkers and philosophers who relied on sentiments

¹⁰ Charles Comte (1782-1837) and Charles Dunoyer (1786-1864) were liberal publicists and lawyers; they edited together *Le censeur* (1814-5) and *Le censeur européen* (1816-9). Comte was Say's son in law.

such as Constant (*ibid.* 41). Here he closely followed Say's approach, that men should be driven by their interest,¹¹ provided that this interest is well understood (*intérêt bien entendu*) or self-love (*ibid.* 102) enlightened by the truth established by social science.

Comte contrasted the religious and the utilitarian approaches with regard to the legislation they tended to promote. He did not mince words; although he stated cautiously that his comments concerned all religions but one — the true one... — he rejected religion as a sound basis for legislation. The reason was plain: if there was an authority superior to law, such as religious beliefs represented, then nothing could be altered without prior change to this authority, an alteration to which the clergy would be opposed (*ibid.* 218-9, 223-7). This would induce a stationary state and the forces promoting national progress would dissipate (*ibid.* 128). Charles Comte added that, in many instances, the link between religion and legislation was even more perverse, since the same people who were prepared to allow that the precepts of their religion were false nevertheless argued that the people had need of a set of beliefs so that they might remain docile and respectful.

The contrast with the principle of utility — that is to say, the calculation of pleasure and pain for all individuals whose situation was affected by a given legislative measure (*ibid.* 245) — was straightforward. Charles Comte most emphatically emphasised the role of genuine science and national enlightenment.

...considerable dissemination of enlightenment is the way of only effecting legislation and securing the morality of progress. It is necessary that the people become sufficiently enlightened, so that those invested with power, who place some individual interests above general utility, and who do not believe in another world, at least find their hell in this one. (*ibid.* 259-60, n1).

This argument was central for him, and it was the basis of the critique he made of Constant each time this writer was suspected of favouring religious sentiment at the cost

¹¹ This point was elaborated further in a special chapter (Book II, Chapter 4), in which Charles Comte gave his understanding of the utilitarian view of sensationism (C. Comte 1826, I: 353-62).

of the dissemination of a truth deriving from the science of legislation (*ibid.* 249-51, 257)¹².

The increased role that Say and his immediate followers claimed for political economy and utilitarianism was not uncontested, as were also their ideas on religion. An important debate began, involving very different viewpoints. Say mentioned in his letter to Dumont of May 10th 1829 (see above) some of those who were known to him:¹³ Staël and Constant. These authors will now be examined. But there are also others with whom Say was familiar, to whom we will come in due course: Saint-Simon¹⁴ and in particular Auguste Comte.

3. Staël and Constant: Religion and the Liberal Strand of Industrialism

The writings of Germaine Necker de Staël-Holstein¹⁵ and Benjamin Constant de Rebecque are first and foremost political: they seek to found and develop a political science for commercial society in a post-revolutionary context. Their ideas are of material importance here because of the specific criticism they direct to *philosophie économique*. In particular, they emphasise the necessary and positive role played by religion in social life, and the manner in which they do so marks a significant departure from the thinking of the majority of major eighteenth century French philosophers.

¹² A similar point was elaborated by Dunoyer when emphasizing the importance of human capital, that is to say, the capital provided by an able and healthy body and a well-educated mind; the latter being the result of education, religious belief and social morality (Dunoyer 1825; and 1845, vol. III).

¹³ We have considered the connection between Say and the Groupe de Coppet in greater detail in a previous paper (Steiner 2003).

¹⁴ Say was among those who assisted Saint-Simon financially (Gouhier 1964, III: 220); he also sent him a copy of his *Catéchisme d'économie politique* with a long letter arguing that Saint Simon's plan for peace was close to his own views (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrit NAF 24605, f°54). Furthermore, Say, Dunoyer and Charles Comte, the editors of *Le censeur européen*, and Saint-Simon and his assistants, Thierry and Auguste Comte, would have regularly met each other since *L'industrie* was run from the same building (Gouhier 1964, III: 152). Finally, in his autobiography John Stuart Mill mentioned that he had met Saint-Simon in Say's salon (Mill 1993: 75).

¹⁵ Germaine de Staël (1766-1817) was the daughter of Jacques Necker, the celebrated Swiss banker and minister of Louis XVI. Together with Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) she was at the centre of a major intellectual group known as the *groupe de Coppet* — named after one her estates, Coppet in Switzerland. This group included, among others, Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi. On Staël, see for example Balayé (1979); on Constant: Holmes (1984).

Although criticising the liberal creed of Say, Charles Comte and Dunoyer, Staël and Constant are themselves genuine liberal thinkers — Constant’s thought is of the greatest importance for liberal political philosophy — despite the many pages in which they set forth ideas usually attributed to antiliberal writers. This makes their position all the more interesting.

For present purposes their approach can be restated as follows. Firstly, they direct their analysis to the new social order at the heart of modern society, and they emphasise the fundamental role that a new form of liberty plays. Secondly, they strongly disagree with a generalisation of the so-called principle of utility to the social order, and criticise the widespread belief that, in a modern society, morals should be based on interest. Thirdly, they explain why “religious sentiment” and ideas have a leading role to play in the new liberal order.

The fundamental feature of the new society: the “liberty of the Moderns”

What are the foundations of the new social order? An opposition between the Ancients and the Moderns is heavily emphasised, between two kinds of society involving two very different attitudes on the part of citizens with respect to political activity and the State.

Staël writes in her *Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution* that in ancient societies, in the times of the Greek cities and the Roman republic for example, those who were citizens — free men — were deeply involved in politics and in the discussion and/or management of public activities. This “liberty of ancient times” (Staël 1799: 95) involved deep and far-reaching commitment — generally facilitated by the small size of the republic — up to and including the sacrifice of one’s wealth and life, if the law or safety of the republic so demanded. Political organisation bound its members tightly and imposed particular habits and behaviours on all activities of the citizen.

In modern times, however, things are quite different. The “liberty of our times” (*ibid.*: 94) consists of the possibility, for citizens, to accumulate wealth, to live a private life in total independence of the State — “private” being understood extensively, including professional activities.

The liberty of present times consists of everything that guarantees the independence of the citizens from government. The liberty of ancient times consists of everything that guarantees to the citizens the greatest part in the exercise of power. (*ibid.*: 94-5).

What the modern citizen seeks is total freedom to earn a revenue in whatever activity he or she wishes, and the enjoyment of his or her wealth and life without taking up arms or being disturbed by other citizens, or by political turmoil. Modern citizens are “peaceful egoists” (*ibid.*: 92). “Agriculture, commerce, public debt, taxes, peace and war — all this concerns [the mass of citizens] for it only has a single desire: ease and tranquillity.” (*ibid.*: 90).

The modern legislator must not forget that, as a consequence, people will usually display a particular indifference to politics (*ibid.*: 94) — “Political activity: of no use since the individual happiness” notes Staël (*ibid.*: 310) —, even concerning the form of government. “The nation wants only results and is not concerned about the means. In one era the Republic is thought most favourable to its ease, in another monarchy.” (*ibid.*: 91)

These form the basis of the modern social contract: the role of the State is purely negative, in the sense that the objective of law and public institutions is merely to secure the autonomy and safety of individuals (Staël 1799: 198; see also Staël 1813, II: 192).

Staël declares moreover this historical evolution of societies to be irreversible. First of all, a reversion to ancient times is now clearly impossible: the mind of today is totally different, and countries are so extensive and densely populated that the direct participation of citizens in political life is simply out of the question — only a representative government is feasible (*ibid.*: 13), thus increasing the inherent tendency of citizens to concentrate on their own private lives (*ibid.*: 93).

Secondly, even if such a small state were still to exist with such a political constitution, it could not endure because of the inexorable tendency for states to grow in size (Staël 1796: 110).

Thirdly, it is also obvious that, following the great philosophical developments of the eighteenth century and the social and political earthquake caused by the Revolution, it is not even possible — contrary to the assertions of traditionalists — to go back to a form of pre-revolutionary society. The law of the “perfectibility of the human mind” and the recent impressive progress of the sciences — including moral and political sciences — prevent it. There is no way out: we cannot but accept how things stand, and infer from this the best way to organise the political life of the country.

Benjamin Constant made extensive use of this polarity (Constant 1806: 357-81; 1814: 182-95), but his most celebrated text remains his 1819 address in the Athénée Royal: “De la liberté des anciens comparée à celle des modernes”. There he sums up the distinction between the Ancients and the Moderns in a striking way:

[In Rome] *Mœurs* are ruled by laws, and just as *mœurs* apply to all, so there is nothing left ungoverned by law. In ancient society, while the individual was nearly always supreme in public affairs, he was enslaved in all private relations. By contrast, in the modern world the individual, independent in private life, is only apparently supreme even in the freest of states. (Constant 1819: 496)

The “individual liberty” — the “civil liberty” — of the Moderns rests upon “guarantees conferred by institutions” (*ibid.*: 502) to private enjoyments.

Does this mean that, in a modern society, political freedom is neither practised, nor necessary? If this were the case, Staël’s and Constant’s position would perfectly exemplify Isaiah Berlin’s idea of “negative liberty”. But it is not so. Constant is fully aware that the tendency to neglect or give up political freedom is “the danger presented by modern liberty” (*ibid.*: 512). Citizens must resist this temptation and be careful not to surrender political liberty — reconceived and adapted to the new society — since it nonetheless remains necessary. It is the guarantee and safeguard of civil liberty. “Far from opposing one freedom to another, it is necessary to present the first as guarantee of the second.” (Constant 1806: 373; cf. also 1819: 509)

Opposition to the principle of utility and the morals of interest

Jean-Baptiste Say also alluded very briefly to the difference between the Ancients and Moderns (Say 1803, II: 262-4, 455-62). But he differs from Staël and Constant on an important point: his appreciation of the consequences of modern liberty in a commercial society is unambiguously positive. Staël and Constant, on the contrary, are of the opinion that these consequences can be extremely negative. This is where the critique of *philosophie économique* begins. Here we can find the foundation for a positive role of religion.

According to Staël, if people are left to pursue freely their private activities, even within the “negative” rules of police and justice dictated by the state, society unavoidably goes to ruin: people will act in an entirely selfish way and destroy all social bonds. A dramatic choice is proposed: civilisation or moral depravity. “But today [...] if no motivation for emulation is provided to talent, the taste for money will take its place. [...] There will be soulless corruption, and that is the lowest level to which the human species can fall.” (Staël 1818: 333) “Exaltation of self-interest” leads only to moral and economic violence (Staël 1799: 227).

These negative consequences follow from the fact that people behave solely according to the principle of utility, base their morals upon interest. In her celebrated novel *Corinne ou l’Italie*, Staël is strongly negative when she speaks of economic self-interest and avidity (Staël 1807: 118, 122-3, 142) — Jean-Baptiste Say complained, in his “Essai sur le principe d’utilité”, that she could write of “this arid principle of utility which fertilises so many corners of the earth, rendering sterile the vast domain of sentiment and thought” (Staël 1807, in Say, 2003a: 144). But *Corinne* is just a novel. In *De l’Allemagne* (1813) her views are more developed.

There we can find a vigorous critique of morals based on self-interest and its philosophical underpinning: sensationist philosophy. It is the success of sensationist ideas in the eighteenth century that both explains the decay of religious sentiment during the Enlightenment, and the success of the “morality founded upon self-interest”. This philosophy, reasoning in terms of pleasure and pain, did in fact emphasise self-love, and induced human beings to devote all their time and effort to the pursuit of material

well-being (Staël 1813, II: 116). At this point, Staël strikingly remarks, “Enlighteners became arsonists” (*ibid.*: 108).

Firstly, in this system, where all element of the will are derived externally through sensations, true morals are necessarily destroyed: anyone can justify any conduct, simply claiming that it was caused by external circumstances. A general system of irresponsibility is thus likely to emerge, denying any free will.

Second, this system is dangerous for the peace and happiness of citizen and state. Morals based on individual interest do indeed generate the idea that, at the collective level, prudence in the conduct of the state follows from a collective or national interest — and this would have two negative consequences. In the first place, this would unfortunately be likely to justify injustice and crime (*ibid.*: 190). In the second place, this would also complete the destruction of true morality in the mind of the citizen.

Last but not least: the proof of the spirituality of the soul cannot be found in the realm of sensations, and true religious sentiment is thus destroyed (*ibid.*: 183).

In this system of thought, in sum, “man will be no more than a mechanism within the great mechanism of the universe: his faculties no more than clockwork, his morals a calculation, and his worship success.” (*ibid.*: 101) Corrupted men hence equate the just and the unjust, or rather consider them to be part of a game played well or ill. For the sensationist philosophers “there is in the conduct of life only skilful schemes and unskilful schemes” (*ibid.*: 182). Staël argues against consequentialism:

If calculation rules everything, the actions of men are judged following success: the man whose good intentions have caused suffering will be properly blamed; the perverted but skilful man will be justly applauded. Finally, individuals will come to consider themselves no more than obstacles or instruments, they will loathe each other as obstacles, and regard each as no more than means. (*ibid.*: 185)

At first sight, Constant’s opinion of modern society appears to be different, and much more in line with the ideas of Say, Charles Comte or Dunoyer. And he does suggest two very positive points in favour of modern society.

In the first place, he insists on the positive progress achieved by modern commercial society and “industrie” with respect to the society it replaces: the Old Regime. This progress is, of course, material, but also moral. The system of the Old Regime, based on “privilege” and favours, created a society of beggars of dubious morality. By contrast, the industrial system allows to human beings their dignity and liberty (Constant 1825: 667)

In the second place, Constant endorses the view that self-interested behaviour and freedom lead to a politically valuable result in terms of efficiency. In the preface he wrote to his *Mélanges de littérature et de politique* (1829), he is emphatic:

I have defended the same principle for forty years: complete liberty, in philosophy, in literature, in industry, in politics. And I mean by liberty the triumph of individuality, in respect both to authority which seeks to govern through despotism and to the masses who arrogate the right to subordinate the minority to the majority. (Constant 1829b: 520)

In his book of commentaries on Filangieri, we can read a sentence which could also have been written by a follower of *philosophie économique*: “Leave egoism to itself: private egoisms will struggle among themselves; the one will cancel out the other.” (1822-4: 320) And he concludes the book with these unambiguous words: “For thought, for education, for industry, the slogan of government must be: *Laissez faire et laissez passer*.” (*ibid.*: 332; see also 1806: 317-8)

But it is also Constant’s view that the progress generated by “industrie” and the efficient role of self-interest are not without problems. While self-interested behaviours can neutralise each other, in some circumstances, this neutralisation can fail.

The public spirit is only perverted by egoism if poor government combines all egoism in opposition to the ideas of justice; nature, which has endowed man with love of himself for his personal preservation, has also given him sympathy, generosity, pity, so that he does not sacrifice his fellow men. Egoism only becomes destructive if this counterweight is destroyed. (Constant 1822-24: 320)

Thus the naked competition of self-interest in markets is not enough for the attainment of harmony. Self-interest is supposed to be checked by some positive virtues: sympathy, generosity and pity. The problem is that, for Constant, in a modern society this equilibrium between self-interest and virtue can be destroyed to the benefit of the former, and not only because of state intervention: these virtues are likely to disappear for a more fundamental and structural reason.

The negative aspect of modernity is best developed in his 1826 review of Dunoyer's *L'industrie et la morale* (Constant 1826a), later republished under the title "De M. Dunoyer, et de quelques-uns de ses ouvrages" with the addition of some pages criticizing Bentham¹⁶ and the principle of utility (Constant 1829a).

Firstly, the material success of modern society, based as it is on "industrie" and on the enjoyment of civil liberty and privacy, unavoidably leads to moral lethargy, apathy: to moral decay. Citizens, living in a state of material wealth, tend to accept any compromise in order to preserve their wealth and well being, endangering domestic political liberty and even the independence of the country. (1826a: 420-1) This process of compromise also naturally entails a deterioration in the moral position of human beings, who now appear to be no more than animals: "this state of civilisation tends toward [...] good order, rather than moral virtue. However, good order [...] is rather a means than an end. If, in maintaining it, one sacrifices all generous emotion, men are reduced to a condition little different to that of some industrious animals, for well-ordered hives and artistically-constructed huts cannot represent an ideal for the human species." (*ibid.*: 421; 1824-31: 29-34.)

Secondly, Constant champions the notion of natural rights against the desire of Bentham to replace it with the concept of utility. It is true, he admits, that a natural right is sometimes imprecise, and can be interpreted in many ways. But the concept of utility is worse in this respect: it can be interpreted in many contradictory ways; and it involves an important subjective and arbitrary element.

The principle of utility has a greater danger than that of law, since it

¹⁶ Germaine de Staël also alludes to Bentham and Dumont in a long footnote in *De l'Allemagne* (see Staël 1813, II: 185-6).

arouses in the mind of man hope of profit, and not the sentiment of duty. But the appraisal of profit is arbitrary; it is the imagination which decides; but neither its error nor its caprice are capable of altering the notion of duty. (Constant 1829a: 552)

Natural rights, the sentiment of duty, are causes, and independent of any calculation. Utility is just a result, a consequence. And the principle of utility, as Constant, like Staël, emphasises, inducing everybody to calculate in terms of pleasures and pains, is destructive of morality (*ibid.*: 554). Constant naturally states that it is always possible to redefine the concept of utility so that one might infer from it the same rules as those following from natural law and justice. But this would be vain and dangerous:

...the word utility, following common usage, puts us in mind of a different idea to that of justice, or of law. Insofar as usage and common sense attach a specific meaning to a word, it is dangerous to alter this meaning; one vainly explains subsequently what one wished to say; the word remains, the explanation forgotten. (*ibid.*: 551-2)

The same argument is advanced with respect to morals based upon interest and the notion of interest well-understood. Constant remarks that if many authors can maintain that actions based on self-interest always coincides with sound morality and justice, this is because the notion of self-interest is used in a much broader and philosophical way than usually understood. Authors like Say, for example, emphasise the fact that this self-interest must be enlightened. Men, Say writes, must always follow "a self-interest which one has good reason to regard a superior to passing and risky advantage" (Say in 2003a: 142) resulting from the satisfaction of a more immediate self-interest. From this perspective, good laws are "*monitors that constantly turn each man away from sacrificing a LASTING interest to a MOMENTARY interest – the latter seeming vivacious, the former less lively, but all the same, superior.*" (Say's emphasis, 2003a: 142) Constant disagrees and questions this kind of argument. This acceptance of the word self-interest, he states, might be true of the best philosophy, and a man should of course avoid an action which will hurt others' interests in order to bring him an immediate pleasure, but which will also later bring him lasting pain. But people simply do not understand this way of thinking and, as far as they are concerned, self-interest only entails an immediate and

restrictive meaning. As a consequence, “when you say to them [the people] that they must govern according to their self-interest, they hear that they have to sacrifice to their interest all opposing or rival interests.” (Constant 1829a: 548) We have come back to the most negative effects of the liberty associated with the Moderns.

Religion and the liberal socio-political order

In sum, for Constant as for Staël, the analysis of modern society reveals a worrying situation. The liberty of the Moderns, the morality based on self-interest and the principle of utility, strictly separates “the logical and rational part of man” from his “noble and elevated part” — the realm of sentiments — retaining the first and rejecting the second. Constant thought it high time to react against this state of affairs (Constant 1829a: 550). But how can this be done? Next comes the fundamental role of genuine morals and of religion.

All systems can be reduced to two only. One gives self-interest as its guide, and well-being as its end. The other proposes that the end is perfection, guided by intimate sentiment, the abnegation of self and the faculty of sacrifice. (Constant 1824-31: 33)

Staël’s conviction is not different. The true understanding of human beings, the true philosophical system lies not in “experimental philosophy” i.e., sensationism, nor in “speculative philosophy”: it is equally nonsensical to blindly trust the sensations, or to reject their evidence. Both philosophies are unacceptably one-sided and cannot grasp the complexity and truth of the moral world. Both sides are necessary: reason and sentiment, each having its own field, must support each other.¹⁷ Each field is legitimate, provided however that the soul, the religious sentiment and morals have the last word (Staël 1813, II: 95).

At all levels of society — individual as well as collective — morals are necessary to counteract the corrosive effects of the form of liberty espoused by the Moderns. The very recent example of the darkest moments of the French Revolution, where all moral

¹⁷ This is why Staël so warmly welcomed the ideas of Kant who marked out “les limites des deux empires, des sens et de l’âme, de la nature extérieure et de la nature intellectuelle.” (1813, II: 129)

bonds were suppressed, forms a negative and illuminating illustration of this proposition (Staël 1799: 298-9).

At the individual level, each person is greatly helped in his choices by a kind of moral code he or she receives in childhood. This code generates feelings and habits before a human being is able to think carefully and to calculate (Staël 1800: 378). Morals are also necessary at the collective level. They form an effective protection against the “métaphysique du vague”, false deductions and fanaticism. The legislator must rely on philosophy, and philosophy “has to rest on two foundations, morality and calculation”. Morals are thus a powerful and necessary check upon the legislator’s action: one should never depart from this principle, Staël goes on: “that every time that calculation fails to coincide with morals, it is calculation which is wrong.” (*ibid.*: 374)

But where do morals originate? “Religion is the true foundation of morality” (Staël 1813, II: 199). Of course some people will always contest the religious origin of moral ideas. But in vain: the best proof that morals come from God is that those who deny this fact are obliged to deify morality itself! (Staël 1800: 380) At both individual and collective levels, only religion provides human beings with a complete and basic moral code which permits social pacts.

Morality, and morality bound into religious opinion, gives the sole complete code for all life’s actions, a code which brings men back together through a kind of pact of the spirit, an indispensable preliminary for any social contract.. (Staël 1799: 214)

Most of the time, people practice virtue in an impulsive manner. The origin of these impulses cannot be found in reflection, but in something different, higher and prior to all reasoning. First come the habits that religion creates in human beings, for it is part of their education (Staël 1800: 378). But this of course cannot be the main reason. Something more is needed to explain why a virtuous human being often sacrifices some earthly pleasure or material interest in order to adopt a moral attitude. The real point is the very nature of religious feeling: a “sentiment of the infinite”.¹⁸ “All sacrifices of personal interest come from this need to place oneself in harmony with this

¹⁸ See also Staël’s reference to Schleiermacher’s ideas (Staël 1813, II: 248).

sentiment of the infinite, whose attraction is fully experienced, even if it cannot be expressed.” (*ibid.*: 239) Only this “sentiment of the infinite” can provoke strong, lasting and “sublime emotions”, and only these sentiments, or religious emotion, can induce people to fight against and defeat negative passions (*ibid.*: 272).

As for Constant, it is his opinion that the very nature of the human being is to evolve and constantly develop, bettering his mind together with his intellectual and moral abilities. This is the work of civilisation. With modern society, succeeding the Old Regime, civilisation took a large step forward: but, as outlined above, it is still imperfect. Constant is convinced however that these defects can be cured. The unique solution consists in arousing and maintaining “the most that is possible, nobles and disinterested sentiments” (*ibid.*: 421).

The practice of political liberty can help, and this is a reason why Constant warns against its neglect (Constant 1819: 513). But this practice alone cannot be conclusive. Moral sentiments depends in fact on religion. Morals and religious sentiment — defined in a rather loose way and not susceptible of rational discourse (Constant 1806: 142; 1826b: 528) — have the same origin, God. “Morals are the work of God, as the religious sentiment itself; they come from the same source. Morality is similar in its lack of origin, and independence. Its rule is placed in every heart.” (Constant 1824-31: 513) Everything therefore comes from a kind of universal and intimate revelation that everybody can freely feel, independently of any intercession on the part of any other human being — priests — and thus of any dogma.

Yes, without doubt there was a revelation, but this revelation is universal, it is permanent, it has its source in the human heart. Man need only listen to himself, he need only listen to a nature which speaks to him with a thousand voices to be carried invincibly into religion. There is also no doubt that external objects have an influence upon beliefs; but they modify the forms, they do not create the inner sentiment which forms their basis. (*ibid.*: 43-4)

In addition, Constant is also anxious to show that the broad diffusion of morals and religion is not at all counterproductive materially and economically — contrary to

what some followers of *philosophie économique* might have thought. This is the reason why he laid heavy emphasis upon the fact that the countries in which religious sentiment is the most widespread, namely England and the United States, are also the most successful in economic matters and development.

Look around you. Intolerance did what it could to make religion odious. Incredulity did what it could to make it ridiculous, yet religious feeling is everywhere. Look at England, this crowd of sects which make it the object of their most lively ardour and of their assiduous meditations. England is however first among European countries for work, production, industry. Look at America [...]. America covers the seas with its flag; it devotes itself, more than any people, to the exploitation of physical nature; yet such is the degree of religious feeling in this region, that often just one family is divided into several sects, without this divergence disturbing the peace or domestic affection, because the members of this family come together in the worship of a just and beneficial providence, coming together like travellers at a destination goal which they have reached by different paths. (Constant 1825: 672-3)

This leads us to a last important point. When they speak of religious sentiment, are Staël and Constant indifferent to the kind of religion which can produce this sentiment, are they favouring any specific institutionalised faith; or are they suggesting the creation of a new religion? Their position cannot be elaborated any further here, but it can be summarised briefly in four points.¹⁹ First, they accept the basic teaching of the Christian faith which, they say, is in accordance with the principles of liberty and equality. Second, religious sentiment is a highly personal feeling, independent of institutionalised churches. The institutionalisation of religion and the existence of a clergy is considered to be a negative point that can prevent the full development of this sentiment, and even kill it off. One of the best expressions of genuine faith, according to Staël, is for

¹⁹ Staël’s ideas are scattered in almost all her writings — she also acknowledged her debt to the ideas developed by her father in *De l’importance des opinions religieuses* (Necker 1788). Constant more specifically developed his position in his *Principes de politique* (1806), his article “Du développement progressif des idées religieuses” (1826b) and, of course, his grand *opus* on this subject: *De la religion* (1824-31).

example Rousseau's celebrated "Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard".²⁰ Third, if an institutionalised church had to be selected, this would obviously not be the Catholic church, but some modernised version of the Protestant church. Fourth, while they are hostile to the clergy, they are all the more opposed to any combination of religion and politics, and thus against any theocracy. Religious freedom is the only just political standpoint for a state, the only one, moreover, capable of preserving religious sentiment, and even of favouring its diffusion.

All these points are not only essential for an understanding of the positions taken by Staël and Constant, but also to distinguish their ideas from those of the other schools of thought dealt with in this paper. For example, while Say was a-religious, the Traditionalists²¹ — in fact another target of Constant and Staël — were Catholic, and so were later the various authors who, from the 1840s on, wrote in defence of political economy (see below, section 5). On the contrary, the Saint-Simonians and Auguste Comte, to whom we turn now, rejected Christian faith in the modern age, and are in favour of the creation of a new religion and, moreover, of a theocracy. These different positions are as we can see rather sharply differentiated.

4. Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians and Auguste Comte: the Organisational Strand of Industrialism

Claude-Henri Saint-Simon

After the fall of Napoleon's regime, publicists interested in social sciences felt free to publish again and to address the public. Say immediately published an updated second edition of his *Traité d'économie politique* (1814), soon followed by the third (1817) and the fourth (1819). The book was a success and the managers of the Athénée Royal, a private teaching institution, asked Say to give a series of lectures on political economy

²⁰ Inserted in his philosophical novel, *Émile ou De l'éducation* (1762).

²¹ These Traditionalists — we employ the term used by French historians — were those political philosophers like Bonald or Maistre (see above, §1), and those politicians who would have liked to annihilate the political conquests of the French Revolution. A celebrated assertion by Bonald illustrates this trend of thought rather well, when he states that men cannot give any constitution to the religious or political society, just as they cannot give gravity to bodies or extension to matter. For what concerns the Catholic economists proper, the "first generation: 1829-34" (Almódovar and Teixeira, 2008) in fact started publishing after Staël's death and just before Constant's.

during the winter of 1815-6; these lectures were also successful, and Say lectured again in 1816-7 and 1819.²² Claude-Henri Saint-Simon attended the first series of these lectures and was very impressed (Gouhier 1964, III: chapters 2-3).²³ This much seems plain when we read Saint-Simon's works, published with the help of Augustin Thierry in the first few volumes of *L'industrie*.

In this short-lived periodical Saint-Simon expressed a high regard for political economy and considered this science to be the bedrock of the new politics he was seeking, to bring peace to France and Europe.²⁴ What was the reason for such an enthusiastic perspective? Basically, it came from Saint-Simon's endorsement of the logic of interest:

There is an order of interests felt by all men, interests which nourish life and wellbeing. This order of interests is the only one upon which all men need agree, the only one where they have to deliberate, to act jointly, thus the only one around which politics can be pursued and which has to be taken as the sole standard for criticism of all institutions and all social matters. Politics is thus, in sum, the *science of production*, that is, the science which has as its aim the order of the things most favourable to all forms of production. (Saint-Simon & Thierry 1817, I: 188)

At that time Saint-Simon was clearly on the side of *Philosophie économique*. As a consequence of the role given to political economy, morals suited to the new social system (industrialism) were grounded upon concrete interest: "The era of positive ideas now begins: one cannot give to morals anything but palpable, certain and present interest" (*ibid.*, II: 38). But two years later, when he began working with Auguste Comte after Thierry's departure, Saint-Simon's view on morals and interests changed radically

²² The manuscripts of the last series of these lectures were among Say's papers; they are now published in Say's *Leçons d'économie politique* (Say 2003a).

²³ There is a handwritten note about Say's second lecture in which Saint-Simon emphasised the necessity of spreading good principles in order to build sound public opinion. He added that the leading bankers and manufacturers should have attended Say's opening lecture (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrit NAF 24605, F^o33).

²⁴ Contrary to Say's cautious efforts to distance politics from his political economy, Saint-Simon exhorted him to fully grasp the political content and consequences of his science (Saint-Simon & Thierry 1817, I: 186).

(Steiner 2006a, 2006b). From now on and right to the end, he claimed that societies rested on two pillars: interests and common moral ideas, because men needed both material and spiritual bonds to live together.

A society cannot exist without common moral ideas; and this commonality is as necessary to the spiritual as well as the temporal community of interest. However, these ideas cannot be shared in common if they lack a basis in a philosophical doctrine that is universally taken into the social edifice; this doctrine is the keystone of the arch, the link that unites and consolidates all parts. (Saint-Simon and Comte 1821: 51)

It is important to notice that common values (*idées morales communes*) are equal in importance to self-interest and are considered to be the central element presently lacking in the social sciences and industrial society. What explains the emphasis put on values?

According to Saint-Simon and Comte, industrialism was threatened by its own motivating force: by material interest, a dynamising element that has a name in the science of morals: egoism, or selfishness. Egoism endangered industrialism because it meant that people acted in isolation, thus severely weakening social bonds. Both writers considered that this situation demanded a new moral element, which they called philanthropy. They described the major issue facing industrial society in an “Adresse aux Philanthropes”:

Cupidity has been a national sentiment and has only been experienced by citizens in a collective manner [during conquests]; greed becomes a dominant sentiment in all citizens; egoism, which is the moral gangrene of the human race, catches hold on the political body and becomes a sickness common to all classes of society. (*ibid.* 90)

Morals became in this way central to the stabilisation of the new social system: without common moral beliefs, the economic wellspring of action would block all collective achievement, and personal interest would prevail at the cost of the social or

general interest. Here lies the moral illness of the industrial system; here is the social meaning Saint-Simon and Comte attached to *égoïsme*.

For a brief period they considered the Christian moral code to be the best possible moral code (Saint-Simon and Comte 1823-4, IV: 200-1), but in his last book Saint-Simon expressed the view that a *new* Christianity should take the place of the outmoded and exhausted version (Saint-Simon 1825)²⁵. He praised Christian faith because of the universality of its message: “Men must behave to one another as brothers” (*ibid.* 108). Perfectly suited to the Middle Ages, the Christian faith now lagged behind the needs of the present because the modern division of religion from politics was no longer capable of co-ordinating the social system, and also on account of scientific progress. Saint-Simon’s new Christianity gave prominence to the new industrial elites, seeking to find a new relationship between scientific knowledge and morals, the latter being the foundation stone for the science of social organisation (*ibid.* 187). This would permit the eradication of poverty and the enhancement of well-being for the entire society:

Those who must found the new Christianity and who will become the heads of the new church are those men most capable of contributing through their work to the enhanced well-being of the poorest class. The functions of the clergy will be reduced to teaching the new Christian doctrine, on the perfection of which the heads of the church will unceasingly labour. (*ibid.* 117)

The new faith was intended to put an end to present political weakness and ills, that is to say, to the egoism that plagued those efforts made by all useful “industrials”. (*ibid.* 185)

*The Saint-Simonians*²⁶

After Saint-Simon’s death in 1825 his thought was taken up by a group of young men, many of whom were former students of the École polytechnique (Picon 2002:

²⁵ Such a move was not limited to the French social thought; for example, as Steve Medema (2008) shows, with Henry Sidgwick the search for a new form of religion became for a while an issue in England as well.

²⁶ On the history and doctrines of this famous sect, see Charléty’s and A. Picon’s studies.

102-12) — a very selective institution, recognised for the high level of mathematics and physics required and taught. They were considered to be a sect, even a dangerous sect because of their stance as proselytisers for Saint-Simon's thought (Bazard & Enfantin 1829, 1830). They expounded the ideas of their master in a systematic way, while at the same time introducing modifications and lending religion a much more prominent place.

The core message could be summed up in two points. Firstly, their presentation of the doctrine was founded upon the historical approach elaborated by Saint-Simon, according to which understanding of an institution required comparison with similar institutions in the past, even if necessary going back to Antiquity. As a consequence they minted a famous formulation, stating the need to move from the exploitation of men by men to the exploitation of the globe by human industry (Bazard & Enfantin 1829: 24). Secondly, they linked the first type of exploitation and, more generally, contemporary political and social instability to the duality at the root of human agency:

In two words, *calculation* or reasoning, science, applied to *material interests*, is not the sole factor motivating human action; we also act out of *sympathy* which fine arts arouse and favour; we are *reasoners*, but also *impassioned*, we are *self-interested*, but nonetheless we know how to *devote* ourselves to the most general. (*ibid.* 27, and as well 396)

The commitment to the well-being of other people, other-oriented action, was then assigned to religion, and the historical method finally emerged as a powerful tool explaining how religion could once more take its place in industrial society. Following Saint-Simon, they explained history as a succession of organic and critical periods: organic periods are characterized by a clear definition of a social goal and, thus, by a convergence between reason, feelings and actions (*ibid.* 79, 360), between spiritual and material principles, as was the case before the Hellenistic period and from the foundation of the Christian Church to the fifteenth century. In contrast, critical periods are those in which these two principles conflict, and reason, feelings and acts diverge. This was the case from the sixteenth century to the present, and particularly during the Enlightenment, when science and philosophy attacked those religious and political institutions that shackled industrial classes. Does this mean that religious feelings and institutions were losing their importance as the industrialist classes rose to prominence?

That, they argued, would be a misleading view of history. The authors of the *Doctrine de Saint-Simon* explained that critical periods had two different phases. The first is the destructive phase, in which there is still a collective goal and a collective impetus aiming at the destruction of the previous social system; during such phases atheism and egoism reign and irreligion flourishes (*ibid.* 360, 413): this is a state of anarchy (*ibid.* 79). The second phase is characterized by a different task: destruction is no longer on the agenda since a new social system has to be built; this is not easy because anarchy, albeit less violent, is deeply rooted in the mind and behaviour of the various classes, as was the case in France and Europe at that time. The authors of the *Doctrine de Saint-Simon* illustrated these points, noting that there was no longer any collective effort directed to ending anarchy and egoism in science and in industry (*ibid.* 85-92): scientists worked in isolation, hurriedly seeking to establish their discoveries before other scientists did so. The Saint-Simonians acknowledged the progress already made in the industrial domain, but they thought that it could be achieved more rapidly.

What was the rationale behind such a judgement? Industrial effort was made in isolation and egoism prevailed as a consequence of the slogan: *Laissez-faire, laissez-passer*. Every "industrial" sought to achieve his goal according to his own personal interest, without taking a collective interest into account; he relied on personal knowledge and judgment which were neither systematic nor comprehensive.²⁷ Does competition really offer a social mechanism capable of transforming self-interested behaviour into a socially beneficial outcome, as the economists claimed? According to the Saint-Simonians, the answer was in the negative, as commercial crises plainly showed. The slogan to which economists were so deeply attached takes for granted a harmony between personal and collective interest which did not in fact exist. For example, it is not enough to state, as Say did, that the invention of printing machines had created an enormous industry compared to that existing in the era of handwritten manuscripts, because there is a time lag involving unemployment, between the introduction of new machines and the creation of a new and broader market. (*ibid.* 91-2)

²⁷ It is likely that the Saint-Simonians were under the influence of Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi's view of the entrepreneur confronting the world market and, hence confronting that market uncertainty which fostered commercial crisis (Sismondi 1819: 245-60) and, they argued, egoism.

Accordingly, the Saint-Simonians felt the need to promote “enthusiasm for collective life (*vie commune*)” and to spread a “love of the universal family of man”. (*ibid.*: 104) They sought to achieve this in the final lectures of the first series, devoted to the religious future of the industrial system. Pointing to their historical approach to the religious past of humanity, they claimed that religion was not fading. There was no doubt that the Christian faith has lost its power over humanity, for this set of beliefs was no longer suited to the contemporary industrial situation (*ibid.*: 344). In contradistinction to fetishism and polytheism, monotheism — whether Judaism or Christianity — was praised because one unique God was responsible for creation. And Christianity was progressive in comparison with Judaism because the message of love was universal, and not restricted to a single nation (*ibid.*: 420-1).

By proclaiming that the religion is destined once more to reclaim its rule over societies, we are undoubtedly far from claiming that it is necessary to restore any one religious institution from the past [...]. We are proclaiming a new moral condition, a new political condition; and thus also a very new religious condition; because, for us, *religion, politics, morals* are only different names for the same thing. This problem [...] is no less likely to be posed and solved in terms at once simple and clear. (*ibid.*: 415)

The second series of lectures (Bazard and Enfantin 1830) dealt almost entirely with the religious issue. The aim of the book was to provide the basis for the new religion. The principal instrument is the idea of progress. Christianity was an advance upon previous religions because of its doctrines of monotheism and universalism. Yet, this progress was marred by those political circumstances which engendered the serious divide between politics and religion on the one hand (*ibid.*: 24-6), and a serious neglect of the industrial and material dimension of life on the other (*ibid.*: 76-80). What had now to be achieved goes beyond this divide, because of the emancipation of industry from the fetters of previous systems organised as they were around the exploitation of man by man. We are thus led from the religious to the political aspect of this perspective — but both aspects were consistently thought to be equivalent. (*ibid.*: 107-8, 114, 122, 161)

What were the leading principles of this theocracy? The Saint-Simonians explained that politics involved three dimensions: morals (or love), science (or intelligence) and industry (or strength), each of them having a specific structure or hierarchy. The priests of the new religion would be in charge of the connections between the three dimensions, including their hierarchy, and in charge of the link between men and God. (*ibid.*: 115).

At this point, the authors came back to an important point from the earlier volume, explaining that the priests would have to act upon sentiments, and not upon reason. Why? According to them, sentiments were losing their grip upon the industrial population; but this did not mean that reason was growing in importance since the void created by the weakening of the sentiments was being filled with egoistic feelings and behaviours (*ibid.*: 117). Consequently, the priests of the new religion would have to act upon the sentiment of sympathy, which was at the root of the organic phase of the industrial system.

The priests’ duty would also be to coordinate hierarchically the efforts of scientists and “industrials” (*ibid.*: 123). This coordination implied that the organisation of scientific endeavours would be based upon public funds instead of the scientists being financed through wealthy individuals or through the market for scientific books (*ibid.*: 135-7); on the industrial side, this implied that competition would be excluded in favour of a different coordination device: a priest whose business it was to link production and distribution. The priests would “classify [industrial people] according to the capacities and he will distribute according to the work (*œuvres*)” (*ibid.*: 160). Thus the priests would be devoted to the work of hierarchical coordination in science and in industry, linking what had remained separate in the older form of the best religion, Christian Catholicism.

Auguste Comte

An inclination towards religion was also present in Auguste Comte’s writings (Comte 1851-4, 1853) published at the end of our period, when he advocated the need for a new religion and for a new theocracy. This was however linked to his severe criticism of political economy. We should not forget that when Auguste Comte became

his secretary, Saint-Simon gave the young and brilliant former *polytechnicien* the task of reforming political economy (Gouhier 1964, III: 189).

The first instance of this critique appeared in a lengthy paper published soon after Saint-Simon's death, a paper dealing with the spiritual bond in industrial society and with the unsatisfactory nature of social solidarity as conceived in the economists' account of the division of labour (A. Comte 1826). The point of departure was close to that of the Saint-Simonians: society was characterised in terms of self interest and anarchy following the decay of spiritual power; there was a consequent absence of any common system of legitimate general ideas; a lack of public morality, for which the rise of utilitarianism was a good indicator; prominence given to the material dimension of life; and, finally, the increasing centralisation of political power in the hand of administration and government (*ibid.* 184-7). However, Auguste Comte argued that spiritual and political powers were different and should be carefully distinguished, since spiritual power could not do its regulative work if it were involved in those activities specific to government (*ibid.* 181, 193, 204). Accordingly, spiritual power should be limited to the great task of education — the government of opinion (*ibid.* 193) — at the national and also the European level.

According to A. Comte — and here his critique of political economy began — social organisation based on the division of labour inevitably involves a weakening of social bonds, because individuals only consider their personal interest. As a consequence, spiritual and political powers were needed to lend these individuals a common foundation, to remind them of the existence of the general interest (*ibid.* 199). That is why this approach was in conflict with political economy as a political discourse. Auguste Comte did not believe in the existence of beneficial unintended consequences of self-interested behaviour, because individuals were unable to perform the calculation attributed to them. (*ibid.* 209) This critique was expanded in a lecture in his *Cours de philosophie positive* (Comte 1837-42, II: 80-99),²⁸ so that he might discard political economy as a “premature attempt to construct the social sciences”, as he said.

²⁸ We have dealt with this issue in other work (Steiner 2005: chapter 7 and Steiner 2008).

He returned to these issues in his *Système de politique positive* (Comte 1851-4). In this book, he modified his philosophy so that he might bring together the objective and subjective viewpoints. The objective point of view was dealt with in his assessment of the scientific process (Comte 1837-42); and the subjective viewpoint meant the full development of the views exposed in the essay on spiritual power (Comte 1826) which dealt in terms of a religion of the *Grand Être*, or Humanity. Comte acknowledged the positive role of self-interest and markets in the production of the material elements for social life; however, he was more insistent than ever on the necessity of coordinating human behaviours through sentiments and, thus, through the elaboration of a common set of moral ideas belonging to the province of theology.²⁹ How could sentiments and the altruistic dimension of human nature have an influence on human agency? According to him, the altruistic dimension, however weak it might be, gains a great part of its strength from harmony within the social body i.e., the harmony between the different dimensions of social life (*ibid.* 23-4) — what he called the *consensus* (Comte 1837-42, II: 118). Furthermore, the altruistic dimension receives the assistance of love, which seemed to him to be the superior good:

However, the fortune of being loved can never be free of an egoistic inversion: how can we not be pleased at having gained the fondness of the person whom we prefer before all others? If, therefore, to love is the most satisfying thing for us, that confirms the natural superiority of affections entirely disinterested. Our radical inability consists above all in their being instinctively much less powerful than our egoistic inclinations, which are essential to our preservation. But once excited, even for initially quite personal reasons, they tend to increasingly develop, by virtue of their own gentleness [...] Once freed from theological oppression and metaphysical aridity, our heart easily senses that real happiness, as much private as public, consists in the greatest development of sociability and in according to oneself only the necessary satisfactions, as inevitable infirmities. (Comte 1851-4, I: 222).

²⁹ Note that here A. Comte used the old meaning of economy, designating a harmony within the body, or within the nation, or within the social body. (see Faccarello and Steiner 2008)

He explained the superiority of his own religion by the way that it eliminated the egoistic element present within Catholic worship. Instead of asking and expecting something when worshipping God, positive worship was free from any personal interest: The purpose was the unification of the *Grand Être* i.e., the succession of human generations, past, present and future. In the positive view of religion, the Supreme Being is Humanity (*ibid.* 334-5) and the goal is the extension of individual life through subjective (religion) and objective (division of labour) participation in this collective, and thereby real, being:

To exist in others is a very real mode of existence since it fulfils itself, fundamentally the best part of our existence [...] This faculty of freely prolonging our life into the past and into the future so that we might develop the best in the present, is a necessary compensation for the puerile illusions which we have lost irrevocably. Finally come to maturity, the same science which destroys these subjective consolations constructs today the objective base of a compensation previously thought impossible, while allowing each to hope for incorporation into the Great Being and revealing its laws both static and dynamic. (*ibid.* 346-7).

The important role given to the succession of human generations was then emphasised in Comte's examination of the material dimension of life. From his religious viewpoint, the so-called science of economists (*ibid.*, II: 156) missed the point where the formation of capital was concerned: they failed to understand the importance of generational succession, which meant that a given generation received the greatest part of its capital from former generations and had a duty to convey a larger stock of capital to the next. This meant that the economic issue was not limited to the increase in the volume of available capital, but also involved consideration of how wealth is transmitted from generation to generation — that is the Comtian *Grand-Être*. Pushing this idiosyncratic view of the organisation of the material dimension of life further, Comte explained that goods could be transferred through gifts, (market) exchanges, bequests and conquest (*ibid.*). But these four social techniques should be reduced to two: bequests and gift on the altruistic side, exchange and conquest on the egoistic one (*ibid.* 158). The “great human issue”, or the prominence of altruism over egoism, could be resolved

thanks to the superiority of the social dimension of economic life over self interest (*ibid.*, I: 372; II: 173).

5. Conclusion: Political Economy in an Age of Religious Revival

Was political economy transformed as a result of these debates about the importance and role of religion in social life? The answer is of course negative, but religion nevertheless became an integral part of the liberal view of political economy, then considered to be fundamentally aligned with Catholicism.³⁰ The apologetic dimension of political economy *cum* religion assumed different forms, and can be briefly illustrated in the work of three important authors: Frédéric Bastiat, member of the parliament and well known for his position in favour of free trade; Michel Chevalier, a former member of the Saint-Simonian group who became an atypical liberal economist, then teaching political economy in the Collège de France; and Charles Dunoyer, member of the Conseil d'État, the most consistent proponent of a cattalactic order within the French liberal school.

While Dunoyer fully endorsed and radicalized the utilitarian stance of Say's work, he proposed a new and broader definition of political economy giving a new role to education, religion and the State in the formation of industrial man, without allowing for any administrative or political regulation of the market system. He rejected the accusation that the new social system would unilaterally favour self-interest and thus the lure of gain: on the contrary, he said, competitive industrialism was a wonderful institution for the tempering and regulation of the lure of gain through the competitive process. If the moral vices referred to by these accusations still existed, it was because competition had not been systematically introduced (Dunoyer 1845, I: chap. 9-10) — the real connecting link of industrial society. Furthermore, Dunoyer devoted a full volume to the moral components of human capital. A good education, he stated, was necessary to moral education, and he had no doubt that moral education could be directed towards social prosperity as its fundamental goal. Religion was also enrolled in this economisation of social life, and priests were conceived as contributors to morality

³⁰ For a general presentation of the evolution of the Catholic economic thought, see Almodovar and Teixeira 2008.

(*ibid.*, III: 275). He rejected the idea that new religions should be created, such as the one established by the Saint-Simonians (*ibid.*, III: 308-9) — provided that the old forms of religion were practiced in a way that did not impede the progress of arts, mores and social relations. Dunoyer acknowledged the existence of religious sentiment, but he added that this sentiment should be enlightened and regulated, as any other sentiment, so that it could produce those good consequences that could be expected of it (*ibid.*, III: 293).

Bastiat's *Harmonies économiques* opened with an address to youth of France, in which harmony lay precisely at the juncture of religion and political economy:

Young people, you will find the title of this work rather ambitious: HARMONIES ÉCONOMIQUES! Would I pretend to reveal the plan of Providence in social order, and the mechanism of all forces destined for humanity to realise progress? Certainly not; but I would like to place you on the path to this truth: *all legitimate interests are harmonious*. This is the leading idea of this essay. And it is impossible to overlook its importance. (Bastiat 1851: 1-2)

Against the socialists and the reformers, against the Catholics condemning self-interest,³¹ Bastiat explained that self-interest was nothing but the fundamental wellspring of action placed by God within men (*ibid.* 631); and if it could not be abolished out as some reformers thought to do (*ibid.* 633), it could be transformed.

As for Chevalier, he followed on from Bastiat and when he mentioned religion, this was no longer the Saint-Simonian form that he had in mind, but instead the Catholic faith. However, Chevalier had a more optimistic view of the industrial system, and the Leibnizian element — so instrumental in explaining that social suffering was a necessary component of social organisation — cannot be found in his writings.

In the three opening lectures at the Collège de France (Chevalier 1850, 1851, 1852) Chevalier's goal was to put on the same footing not only morals and political economy, but religion as well. According to him, social bonds meant that three kinds of duty

³¹ On the divisions among the liberal and conservative Catholic thinkers of that period see Weill (1909).

constituted the very stuff of social life: duty toward oneself (self-interest), duty towards one's relatives and citizens (association); and duty towards the Creator (brotherhood). This explained why he stated so forcefully that political economy had a spiritual dimension (Chevalier 1850: 211) and why he made such a strong link between political economy and religion — both sharing the principles of freedom and justice (*ibid.* 213-5).

And Chevalier explained that it would be impossible to found political economy *solely* on self-interest and all attempts in that direction should be considered exceptional and short-lived mistakes, since political economy concerned the common interest (*ibid.* 222). In the following lectures, Chevalier added to these statements the idea according to which the desire of well-being was legitimate — which could have been an echo of Bastiat's reference to Bossuet — and, he concluded: “In this sense, progress is a Divine institution” (Chevalier 1851: 125).

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Abstract

There was in early 19th century France a widespread revival of religious sentiment, following the turmoil of the Revolution and the intellectual onslaught upon religion so central to the French Enlightenment. Simultaneously, political economy became more prominent among publicists and political *élites*. These two developments influenced those who sought to further a modern society and who in their different ways expressed a new approach known as *industrialisme*. These writers put forward several versions of the links that should exist in industrial society between political economy and religion.

We first note that a truly a-religious political economy based on self-interested behaviour and utilitarianism, such as the one presented in J.-B. Say's writings, gained acceptance for most people interested in the "new" science. This point of departure is important not only because Say's thought became a major reference for the different conceptions of *industrialisme*, but also because it provided a utilitarian evaluation of religious institutions and feelings.

Next, we notice that some other conceptions of *industrialisme* can be found in the leading members of two distinct schools of thought: the *Groupe de Coppel*, with Germaine de Staël and Benjamin Constant; and the less homogeneous group formed by Claude-Henri Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians and Auguste Comte. Both approaches presumed that self-interest was incapable of uniting the social body, and placed much emphasis on religious feelings in explaining how societies could function harmoniously.

We examine how Staël and Constant dealt with these issues and how, while accepting the principle of competition in economic activity, their conception of the specific nature of liberty in a modern society led them into a critique of utilitarianism and morals based on interest; and also to the idea that the harmonious functioning of the industrial society requires a morality based upon religion

We then study how *industrialisme* was modified to fit the views of modern society held by Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians, and Auguste Comte. Political and civil liberty was not a central matter for these writers. Instead, they rather favoured the creation of organisations capable of regulating a chaotic social order; and in this perspective new forms of religion were given a prominent place, specifically formed to suit the industrial social order and based on philanthropy or altruism.

In the concluding section we briefly note that, after all such criticism, some leading liberal economists reacted in defence of political economy and developed their own conceptions of the links between economics and religion: they rejected the idea of the necessity of a new religion and insisted instead on traditional Catholic ideas. But then political economy and religion were conceived as two pillars of a conservative order following the rise of socialist ideas.