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Defining modernity: mentality and ideology under the French Second Empire

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DEFINING MODERNITY:
MENTALITY AND IDEOLOGY UNDER
THE FRENCH SECOND EMPIRE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts

In

The Department of History

By

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Abstract

This study intends to examine the relationship between popular conceptions of modernity and Republican ideology during the Second Empire, 1852-1870. With the advent of the industrial revolution in France, scientific knowledge came to be equated with notions of progress and innovation, leading intellectual elites to design philosophical and social systems predicated upon the authority of scientific analysis and objectivity. Influenced by the intellectual currents under the Second Empire, a new generation of Republican political theorists incorporated notions of science into their ideological outlook, ultimately engendering a moderate brand of Republicanism which played a significant role in the founding of the Third Republic after 1870.

The efforts of intellectuals and Republican elites formulated a social program which utilized popular conceptions of science and progress to promote democratic and secular values, as well as discourage political violence. In defining their vision of modern society, the *jeunes républicains* consciously created an ideological system that comported with the hegemonic ambitions and social outlook of the new French bourgeoisie coming of age under the Second Empire. Thus, the exaltation of science, industry, and progress proffered by intellectuals and moderate Republican theorists constituted an affirmation of urban bourgeois values, with the subsequent social visions derived from such considerations reflecting and legitimizing, in part, these values and principles.

In evaluating the conflicts and dilemmas which faced Republicans under the Second Empire, this study seeks to reveal the importance of the imperial period in shaping the ideological outlook of the Third Republic. Offering a comprehensive view of modern society based upon popular notions of science and progress, Republican elites

were able to establish a progressive and democratic political program which formulated a conception of modernity consistent with the interests and outlooks of the urban bourgeoisie seeking primacy under the Second Empire. The establishment of the Third Republic in 1870 and subsequent political victories in the 1880s signaled the triumph of the ideals and objectives devised by moderate Republicans between 1852 and 1870.

Introduction

At the Crossroads of Modernity

Observing the displays of French art at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1867, the critic Théophile Thoré detected a feeling of transition and change as he walked through the exhibition halls. “We are between two worlds,” he wrote, “. . . between a world that is ending and a world that is beginning.”¹ Thoré’s critique could have been extended to the entirety of the Second Empire. The near two decades of imperial rule bore witness to the material progress and technological advancements brought to the nation by the industrial revolution. Trains and rail lines now facilitated travel and transportation throughout the country; telegraph lines expedited the flow of communication; mechanized production turned out moderately priced goods at a rapid rate while modern credit systems provided the capital needed for industrial ventures; in almost every sector of life under the Second Empire, modernity was impinging upon the familiar world to which Frenchmen had been accustomed, and, in conjunction with the growth of capital, one of the primary forces bringing this new world into existence was science.

“It is not an exaggeration to say that science contains humanity’s future,” claimed the theologian Ernest Renan, “that it alone can speak the words of destiny to him and

¹ Théophile Thoré, “Exposition Universelle de 1867,” *Salons de W. Bürger, 1861 à 1868* (Paris: Renouard, 1870), 2:385.

reveal the way in which to reach his end.”² The praises sung to the benefits of science were not only to be found in the intellectual and academic circles of the period. The government commission appointed to draw up plans for a colonial venture in Mexico during the 1860s posited as one goal of the intended expedition to spread civilization and the “scientific spirit” among the primitive inhabitants of the country.³ In the mind of the mid-nineteenth-century Frenchman, science connoted an expansive concept, a form of modernity which promised innovation and progress, the withering of provincial attitudes, the promoting of technological advancement, and even the perfecting of the human intellect. At the heart of cultural and intellectual outlooks, modernity became a living idea in the popular imagination, and science was increasingly seen as its harbinger.

Despite these feelings of growing expectation and optimism, however, the Second Empire remained, as Thoré’s comment affirmed, situated at the crossroads of modernity, a point between an old and dying world fading into twilight and the more modern and innovative nation yet to be born. While the Second Empire satisfied modern economic expectations, politically and socially the regime stood upon the threshold of modernity, remaining ill-equipped to take the necessary steps to complete such a profound transformation. Vaunting a progressive political agenda and encouraging industrial development throughout the country, the regime nevertheless felt it imperative to give unwavering support to the maintenance of the status quo, persistently associating change with the pernicious force of revolution. Napoleon III’s hope of eventually founding a liberal and progressive regime was quickly diminished by conservatives’ zealous

² Ernest Renan, *The Future of Science* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), 38.

³ Paul N. Edison, “Conquest Unrequited: French Expeditionary Science in Mexico, 1864-1867,” *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 471-74.

obsession with political and moral order and by the influence of clerical officials on the state. Reactionary policies mixed with public declarations in support of progress produced mistrust and skepticism. Able neither to empathize with that older, moribund France nor to embrace the democratic and modern France emerging under his very nose, Napoleon III dithered between the two.

What the Bonapartists were unable to guarantee the oppositional Republicans were more than willing to offer. That Republicans were able to capitalize on the growing sentiments of transition and change during the 1860s was not surprising. The intellectual milieu of the Second Empire had furnished them with a new faith and new principles after the failures of the Second Republic. In a period obsessed with notions of science, progress, and modernity, Republicans drew broad parallels between prevalent intellectual currents and their own political objectives, allying their cause with the defense of a certain France that belonged to the near future but which the Second Empire proved reluctant to embrace. Science, as the young activist Gustave Tridon claimed, was the product of a civilization which manifested man's "genius," a force of "life and progress" which had to be defended from oppression and ignorance.⁴ The Republican poet Victor Hugo extolled the panorama of modernity he found surrounding him, a world "whose arteries are railroads, and whose nerves are electric wires."⁵ Professing a strong belief in the value of scientific progress and human potential, Republicans successfully established themselves as the most innovative party of the political opposition during the 1860s.

⁴ Gustave Tridon, "La Force," *Œuvres diverses de Gustave Tridon* (Paris: Allemane, 1891), 115.

⁵ Victor Hugo, *Napoleon the Little* (New York: Sheldon, 1870), 301.

By the fall of the Second Empire in 1870, the efforts of theorists and activists during the preceding decade had supplied Republicans with a set of strong and unequivocal ideological precepts suited to the founding of a new regime, the long-anticipated Third Republic. Despite the evident maturity of Republican thinking by the advent of the new republic, numerous scholars have dedicated considerable attention to the importance of experience after 1870 in shaping its ideological foundations. The Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune—collectively referred to as the *année terrible*, or “terrible year” of 1870-1871—constitute central themes within such historical inquiries, highlighting the long-term influences that military defeat and violent civil war exercised on prevailing Republican attitudes in the decades to come. Proponents of this school commonly accredit the establishment of a highly centralized Republican state and the cultivation of a strong martial spirit to the dual objectives of national “regeneration” and military reform in France’s efforts to combat the new threat posed by a strong Germany across the Rhine after 1871.⁶ Endemic to such a historical perspective is the marginalization of the Second Empire in the shaping of Republican outlooks, while the first traumatic year of the Third Republic assumes a critical importance.

The “opportunism” of moderate Republicans during the 1870s and 1880s has also been a focus of historical study, further stressing the importance of experience in shaping Republican ideology during the Third Republic. By adapting their political strategies and outlooks to the realities of mass politics, moderates, scholars have argued, were able successfully to synthesize the judicious and pragmatic principles of Liberalism with mass

⁶ Claude Digeon, *La Crise Allemande de la Pensée Française, 1870-1914* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 76-87.

democracy.⁷ It was during the first several decades of the Third Republic, according to James Lehning, that Republicans finally came to formulate solutions to the problems posed by universal political participation. Thus, prior to the 1880s, there existed no clear conceptions of what constituted the republic; only through political experience did Republicans devise solutions and policies which defined the type of democratic society they desired.⁸ Such an analysis offers a heuristic interpretation of Republican ideology and the Third Republic, charting the historical development of the regime as its founders grappled with the transformation from an elite political culture to one based upon mass politics.

Contrary to the role political experience played in defining republican France, others have looked at the policies carried out by the state in shaping the social and political culture of the Third Republic. Eugen Weber's seminal work *Peasants into Frenchmen* has stressed the decisive role played by the state in republicanizing the French nation during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The laying of rail lines, the founding of modern credit systems and banks, and the dissemination of Republican values by means of compulsory education throughout rural France effectively drew the countryside from its self-imposed and outdated cultural autarky. Enacted by Republican politicians, these reforms imposed, in Weber's opinion, a mode of urban thinking upon

⁷ Pierre Lévêque, *Histoire des forces politiques en France, 1789-1880* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1992), 339-341.

⁸ James R. Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001)

the peasantry which engendered a new social and political culture that brought the Republican idea to fruition throughout the country by the turn of the century.⁹

More cynical, Sanford Elwitt has interpreted the role of the state in bringing forth this new Republican society as a tactical strategy employed by elites to assert their cultural and political dominance. Banding together under the banner of Republican democracy, capitalists and bourgeois intellectuals articulated a coherent and viable social alternative which served as the foundation of a bourgeois political order built upon the ruins of the Second Empire after 1870. Exploiting the horrors of the Paris Commune, Republican elites reinforced the threat posed to France by militant socialism and eradicated their leftist competitors. The democratic and moral principles outlined by Republicans both during the Second Empire and the Third Republic were, Elwitt believes, the means to create a bourgeois republic supportive of capital and industry and possessing a modest citizenry sympathetic to middle-class values.¹⁰ Under this Marxist approach, the emphasis is placed upon the role played by cultural elites of the Third Republic in shaping and defining both Republican ideology and society.

Only recently have scholars begun to look at the social and political milieu of the Second Empire in analyzing the origins of the Republican state which followed. The imperial regime was long demonized in Marxist and Republican historiography, underscoring the empire's repressive and authoritarian policies and its culpability in the humiliating defeat during the Franco-Prussian War. Diverging from this customary view, Matthew Truesdell has accurately claimed that Napoleon III's use of ritual and political

⁹ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976)

¹⁰ Sanford Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic: Class and Politics in France, 1868-1884* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975)

panoply to buttress his power encouraged a “new politics for a democratic age.”¹¹ The declaration of universal manhood suffrage in 1848 did, indeed, create a new type of political culture in France, one which the Second Empire was extremely conscious of and which it attempted to manipulate with mixed success. Political ideas and values could no longer be defined exclusively within the perimeters of Parisian elites and were increasingly being disseminated to a larger and more varied audience.¹² Philip Nord has advocated looking at the decades of the 1870s and 1880s in a broader historical perspective, linking trends in Republican political thinking to the last half of the Second Empire. During the 1860s, according to Nord, the roots of the republic were fostered through the slow resurrection of civil society in France. As the imperial government clamped down upon this burgeoning public sphere, it infringed upon vital middle-class interests, such as franchise agreements, business relations, and academic liberties, thereby generating popular support for the democratic political opposition which grew in the last decade of the empire.¹³

While these critiques offer a fresh outlook on the development of Republican ideology under the Second Empire, they nevertheless remain predominantly confined to political practice and policy, thereby failing to recognize the broader cultural and intellectual facets which influenced Republican thinking during the period. In reevaluating their ideological precepts and political strategies, Republicans professed an outlook cultivated by the cultural elites of a new generation primarily drawn from

¹¹ Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the Fête Impériale, 1849-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 191.

¹² Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 23-24.

¹³ Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995)

academia and the middling bourgeoisie. The trends toward modern thinking or “modernism” evident in the philosophical, artistic, and literary circles of the Second Empire offer a wider panorama in which to evaluate emerging Republican ideas of the same nature. Crosscurrents between intellectual and political circles testify to the fact that Republicans did not formulate their theories in a cultural vacuum, an aspect which exhibits the richness and depth of their ideological thinking and which has been grossly understated in contemporary works of scholarship.

The emphasis placed upon the role of elites by Elwitt presents, moreover, an interesting corollary to the years preceding the Third Republic. The exaltation of science, industry, and progress—concepts and ideals associated with a rising urban bourgeoisie seeking to replace the older elite class of aristocrats and notables—proffered by intellectuals and moderate Republican theorists gathering under the banner of “young” Republicans [*jeunes républicains*] constituted an affirmation of bourgeois values, with the subsequent social visions derived from such considerations reflecting and legitimizing, in part, these values and principles. Thus, Positivism’s idolization of industry, scientific knowledge, and a technocratic elite, and the *jeunes républicains*’ condemnation of mob violence and insistence upon rational politics: both signified key elements in a bourgeois world-view, encouraging a social system which would, as the Republican Léon Gambetta believed, secure the predominance of a “*nouvelle couche sociale*,” or new social class drawn primarily from the middle stratum of urban bourgeois society.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid., 48.

In the eyes of moderates, the new horizon symbolic of modernity belonged culturally, socially, and intellectually to this *nouvelle couche sociale*, and was envisioned as their exclusive possession. While the democratic principles endorsed by Republicans provided for an extremely fluid society which encouraged the integration of the citizen into the new social system, the leadership of this new era would reflect the values and sensibilities of the social order which had created it. “Sovereignty must only exercise itself through material and sensible instruments,” claimed the Republican Emile Ollivier. “I believe these instruments are not the *kings*, but all and each, by means of *some people*, the most capable and charismatic [*les plus aimants*]. In this sense, and not otherwise, I accept the sovereignty of the people.”¹⁵ Jules Simon, a conservative Republican and one of the most prominent political theorists of his generation, similarly called for an “aristocracy of talent and probity” to assume a leadership role in the society to come.¹⁶

Yet such elitist sentiments were by no means espoused by all Republicans. The radical egalitarianism endorsed by Jacobin extremists clashed dramatically with the perceptions of cultural elites, fueling the ideological divisions dividing Republicans into two distinct camps during the Second Empire. Prior to the founding of the Third Republic and the outbreak of the Paris Commune, a civil war divided along ideological lines between moderate and radical Republicans, there was little certainty as to the type of Republican order which would define the future. Thus, the ascendancy of the *nouvelle couche sociale* was by no means foreordained, nor was its prominence universal within Republican conceptions of modern society.

¹⁵ Emile Ollivier, *Journal, 1846-1869* (Paris: René Julliard, 1961), 1:116.

¹⁶ Quoted in Philip A. Bertocci, *Jules Simon: Republican Anticlericalism and Cultural Politics, 1848-1886* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 149.

Contrary to explicit Marxist interpretations of Republican ideology in the Third Republic, Republican ideas under the Second Empire should be assessed within a broader intellectual framework. Notions of scientific progress and modernity were central to the ideological outlook and restructuring of Republican social and political principles during the 1850s and 1860s. Promoting conceptions of a dynamic and progressive France on the verge of realization, Republicans defined their cause in opposition to the static and repressive forces—namely, the Catholic Church and the imperial state—believed to be impediments to modernity and progress, either materially, socially, or intellectually. Thus, their program was not simply one of political conviction, but also one of social vision. Republicans sought to bring forth a new kind of society, one already anticipated by the collective outlooks and ideals of their generational coevals. The generation rising to prominence after 1848 envisioned a world radically liberated from past modes of thought and custom, certain of its principles by virtue of scientific knowledge, and progressing toward higher forms of social and moral life. These shared ambitions, manifest in new intellectual and cultural attitudes as well as political thinking during the empire, linked Republican ideology to the larger mentality of its age, rendering it a comprehensive expression of *Zeitgeist*. Professing faith in scientific progress and a seemingly acute awareness of a present vastly different from the past, Republicans were conveying a set of new ideas and intellectual attitudes cultivated by their generation and broadly defined as a *mentalité*.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Mentalité*, or mentality, indicates a broad set of ideas and impressions capable of being infused within a wide array of thought. Popular conceptions, cultural outlooks, and unconscious attitudes all play important roles in shaping the collective representations of a mentality, connoting a habit of mind specific to a period or age. See: Michel Vovelle, *Ideologies and Mentalities*, trans. Eamon O’Flaherty (Chicago: University of Chicago

The relationship between Republican ideology and the new mentality taking shape derived, in part, from the collective experience of 1848. Following the downfall of the Second Republic, intellectuals and political thinkers alike reassessed certain conceptions and ideological outlooks which had been heavily influenced by the romanticism of the 1830s and 1840s. The failures suffered during the 1848 revolution were, therefore, a pivotal moment in both Republican and intellectual circles prior to the founding of the Second Empire, establishing the basis for the fusion of modernist ideas and republican principles which occurred in the 1850s and 1860s.

The overthrow of the unpopular Orléanist regime, the so-called July Monarchy headed by Louis Philippe, on 24 February 1848 was initially greeted with vast enthusiasm. The young journalist Philippe Faur, his head filled with the utopian visions of the popular socialist Charles Fourier, did not hide his zeal over the prospects promised by the revolution: “I am going to fight for Liberty, not for a party. From men and from parties I expect nothing. My hopes are in the action of Providence, in a religious transformation to regenerate society.”¹⁸ From the Hôtel de Ville, the Republican socialist Louis Blanc enunciated the objectives of the new republic to be founded: it would provide employment for all the destitute workers of France and ameliorate the egregious injuries committed against labor by the July Monarchy; a new era was to be born where man reaped the fruits of his own work and communed with his fellow citizen.¹⁹ As the poet Charles Baudelaire observed, during the revolution “everyone built utopias just like

Press, 1990), 1-13; Patrick H. Hutton. “The History of Mentalities: The New Map of Cultural History,” *History and Theory* 20, no. 3 (October 1981): 237-259.

¹⁸ Quoted in T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-1851* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 11.

¹⁹ Jill Harsin, *Barricades: The War of the Streets in Revolutionary Paris, 1830-1848* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 273.

castles in Spain.”²⁰ Utopias were, however, no guarantee of success. Contrary to the airy declarations voiced by the intelligentsia, a radical placard outside the Collège de France declared, “As in 1830, the People are victorious; but this time they will not lay down their arms.”²¹ These ominous words were a more portentous indicator of events to come.

The provisional government’s fixation upon the “social question,” which stressed the plight of the French proletariat and the creation of a social-democratic republic to address the injustices perpetrated by the July Monarchy, appeared too radical for the liberal-minded bourgeoisie and too costly to the peasants. The imposition of a 45 percent surtax on every franc in order to fund the socialist projects of the provisional government aroused the anger of the rural population which, empowered with the vote under the declaration of universal manhood suffrage, now constituted a majority of the French electorate. With dwindling funds, a deepening economic crisis, and growing opposition from both the peasantry and the bourgeoisie, the provisional government established in February found itself walking a precarious line. The closing of the national *ateliers*—workshops set up after February to provide employment and financial aid to destitute French workers in the midst of mass unemployment—to mollify public opinion served only to exacerbate the growing tension between the Republican government and the working class. By June, Paris was engaged in a second revolt, this time divided along the lines of both social class and political ideology. Barricades were thrown up throughout the working-class districts of the capital as the Parisian proletariat cried out “*Aux Armes!*” declaring that it was better to die on the barricades than to starve from hunger. The Red

²⁰ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 107.

²¹ Alfred Delvau, *Les Murailles révolutionnaires de 1848*, 17th Ed. (Paris: E. Picard, 1868), 1: 21.

Days of June, as they became known, thrust Paris into a brutal class warfare that was only suppressed through sheer military might, leaving a death toll of some 1,400 in its wake.²²

The horror and slaughter of June left little doubt in the mind of the bourgeoisie as to the pernicious threat radical socialism posed to the new Republic. What they needed was a strong leader who could promise stability and prosperity, the twin pillars of bourgeois ideology. The peasantry, wary of the government's fiscal policies after the 45 percent surtax, lost what little faith it had in the social democratic Republic. Socialism, as understood by the vast rural population, meant excessive taxation, threatening poverty and foreclosure on the little bit of land it owned. Thus, disillusioned with the revolution, both the bourgeoisie and the peasantry now sought a viable alternative to the volatile Republicans and found it in Louis Napoleon Bonaparte.

The myth of Napoleon— child of the French Revolution, champion of nationalism, and securer of French glory— continued to possess a vigorous appeal within post-revolutionary France. Had there not been calls of “*Vive Napoleon!*” in 1830 when the liberals overthrew the Bourbon dynasty for a second time? Had not Louis Philippe brought the former Emperor's ashes back to France in 1840 as an act of political panoply to symbolize his own dedication to the ideals of the Revolution? Victor Hugo could hardly deny the “beautiful effect” that Napoleon's catafalque created when framed by the Arc de Triomphe.²³ As the crisis of 1848 deepened, the time appeared ideal for a Bonaparte pretender, and who better than his proud and progressive nephew? Although

²² Harsin, *Barricades*, 294-95; Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 22-26; Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 47-53.

²³ Graham Robb, *Victor Hugo* (New York: Norton, 1997), 527.

he spoke French with an awkward German accent from his years of exile, and his thin frame and refined appearance bore only a sparse resemblance to the squat, yet regal image of his late uncle, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte believed in the “destiny” which his birth presaged.²⁴ “I’m going to Paris,” he announced to his cousin upon hearing of the February revolution from his exile in London, “the Republic has been proclaimed. I must be its master.”²⁵

Exploiting the fear of proletarian violence, Louis announced his candidacy for the upcoming presidential election, presenting himself as a counterrevolutionary force capable of restoring order to a divided nation. The self-proclaimed “*homme d’ordre*” drew a wide array of support as his campaign gathered momentum. Conservatives believed he was an assurance against radical socialism. Moderate Republicans associated the name of Bonaparte with the ideals of the Revolution and national glory. The rural peasants, however, gave Louis Napoleon his widest base of support, believing Bonapartism a buttress against the restoration of the *ancien régime* and a protector of the little land acquired after 1789. When all votes were cast, Louis polled nearly 75 percent of the total electorate, a sensational victory by any standard.²⁶

Louis’s commitment to moral and social order was first made manifest upon his assumption of the presidency. He created a ministry composed of monarchical notables, conservatives, and loyal Bonapartists. An entire “system” triumphed, according to the new president, as he reasserted his devotion to “order, authority, religion, and the welfare

²⁴ Napoleon-Louis Bonaparte, *Des idées Napoléoniennes*, trans. James A. Dorr (New York: D. Appleton, 1859), 11.

²⁵ Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16-17; Fenton Bresler, *Napoleon III: A Life* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1999), 222.

of the people.” Radical Republicans, licking their wounds after defeat in 1848, spurned the new government, making known their intention to seek victory in the next presidential election four years later and establishing the “true” Republic. Electoral gains in 1849 and 1850 gave substance to these aims, resurrecting the threat of the infamous *spectre rouge* which persistently haunted conservatives and moderates. With Louis Napoleon’s presidential term set to expire in 1852 and the division between Legitimists and Orléanists preventing unified support for a conservative candidate, the revival of the “reds” appeared plausible. In 1851, conservatives attempted to amend the constitution and eliminate the article preventing consecutive presidential terms. The motion was defeated when the National Assembly was unable to attain the required three-quarters majority to pass such a law. The only alternative was a coup d’état, and on 2 December 1851 Louis Napoleon crossed the Rubicon in the name of political order. Conservatives and moderate Republicans alike supported his illegal action, convinced that the promise of a strong government in the midst of hostile socialism justified the infraction. Although the Second Republic would exist in name for exactly one more year, in reality the infamous *Deux-Décembre* marked its demise and paved the way for the establishment of the Second Empire.²⁷

The failures of 1848 signalled the end of a specific generation within France. The Romantics, born in the aftermath of the French Revolution, had set out to transform the legacy of the Napoleonic Empire and to use its institutions and ideals as a base from which to create a strong and democratic nation. The blow struck to liberal and republican aspirations by the violence and disunity of 1848 bred cynicism and despair. The utopian

²⁷ Bresler, *Napoleon III*, 230, 224-51; Price, *The French Second Empire*, 19-29.

visions and ideals of an entire generation were crushed, seemingly overnight. “With profound sorrow,” wrote the Russian exile Alexander Herzen, “I watched and recorded the success of the forces of dissolution and the decline of the republic, of France, of Europe.”²⁸ After the massacre of the June Days, pessimism and doubt played heavily upon Victor Hugo’s thoughts like a malaise: “Four months ago, the situation was unspoiled. Who will ever recover that virginity? No one. Everything has been ruined and compromised. The mind wanders from the difficult to the impossible.”²⁹ There would be much time for reflection afterwards, much brooding and blame to throw about. Yet the fact remained: the victory of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in France marked the defeat of the Romantics and their vision of an age in which equality, liberty, and national harmony reigned supreme.³⁰

Looking to both the past and a yet unrealized future, the Romantics had set out to transform the expectations and ideals promised by the French Revolution. As an entire generation came to grips with a post-revolutionary Europe, it found solace in the potential for the human imagination, idealization, and personal expression rather than the discursive reasoning of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*. The predominant thought currents stressed the intuitive, the analogical, and the symbolic, mixed with a conception of unity and harmony which reintegrated man into the larger cosmos: what the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge defined as “a sense of the Whole as a living unity, a sense of

²⁸ Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 347.

²⁹ Robb, *Victor Hugo*, 270.

³⁰ Alan B. Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 269-70.

God in all and all in God.”³¹ Recognizing the need for new expressive forms in, as the poet Alexander Guiraud put it, a “world regenerated by the baptism of blood,” the Romantics had redefined post-revolutionary culture, putting faith in the emotive outpouring of the human soul and the idealized conceptions of the mind.³² “We were tormented by desires of an ideal life,” noted the *saloniste* Daniel Stern when discussing the generation of the 1840s in her memoirs, “and we searched for divine meaning in all things. Barely emerging from these extraordinary struggles, where all the foundations of the old world had been shaken, we still quivered with an anxious expectation of the unknown, the extraordinary, and the impossible.”³³

The disillusionment of 1848 was marked by a refutation of metaphysical idealism and mysticism. More “scientific” means were adopted, producing a methodical study of nature and the observable world. The past gave way to the present, and the ideal became eclipsed by the real and tangible. In an industrialized age where scientific discoveries were regularly overturning preconceptions, science alone held the prospect of true enlightenment. The utopias and highly imaginative panoramas of the Romantics crumbled with the diaphanous illusions of the Second Republic, giving life to a modernist mentality which wove itself in and out of intellectual currents during the Second Empire. In its most essential form, modernism promised the liberation of humanity—both

³¹ Quoted in J. L. Talmon, *Romanticism and Revolt: Europe 1815-1848* (Great Britain: Harcourt, 1967), 156.

³² Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820*, 136; Talmon, *Romanticism and Revolt*, 135-165.

³³ Comtesse Marie d’Agoult (Daniel Stern), *Memoires, 1833-1854* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1927), 2.

intellectually and socially—through the development of science and technology.³⁴

Perceptions of progress and scientific achievement evinced a new faith and optimism in French outlooks, giving definition and form to the fecund intellectual atmosphere of the 1850s and 1860s.

Yet in spite of a broad consensus on the benefits of science and an overarching impression of modernity, intellectuals and savants remained divided along certain theoretical lines. At the heart of these debates lay the nature of causality. For some, such as the philosopher Hippolyte Taine, cause was capable of being deduced through scientific investigation, allowing man to understand the totality of the universe and all laws governing it. For others, especially those influenced by the spirit of Auguste Comte's Positivism, causality remained outside the realm of human understanding, for it could not be proven through direct observation.³⁵ Under the Tainean model, the conviction that primary cause could be verified through abstract reasoning imparted a metaphysical certainty to scientific knowledge, obliterating any form of religious consciousness or spirituality and presenting a world in which all mystery was unveiled and man was united with the absolute. Such materialist and quasi-materialist conceptions logically translated into a strong secularism, as science and progress eradicated the notion of God—or any form of spirituality—in the popular consciousness.

Others remained dubious of a system based on metaphysical principles and which promised man the infinite. "It is impossible to go beyond the *how*," claimed the medical theorist Claude Bernard, "that is to say, beyond the proximate cause or the conditions of

³⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 34.

³⁵ D. G. Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France During the Second Empire, 1852-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 140-42.

existence of phenomena.”³⁶ Declaring that cause could not be verified through observable data, those influenced by strains of Comtean Positivism rejected the rigid metaphysical paradigms of the Tainean model and encouraged a scientific outlook tolerant of mystery and confined to the limits of demonstrable knowledge. Transcending metaphysics, Positivism prophesized the perfection of man’s intellect and moral sentiment through scientific analysis, imbuing modern society with a spiritual and moral ethos that would provide the foundation for a harmonious and enlightened world in the future. This evident dichotomy between metaphysical and positive systems generated a duality in leading conceptions of scientific knowledge and progress; thus, the methodology and anti-spiritualism of Hippolyte Taine was set against the social and spiritual thinking of Comte and the Positivists.

If savants remained divided along theoretical lines, so too did Republicans. Although assimilating various aspects of the new mentality into their ideological outlook, Republicans proved unable to articulate a uniform conception of modernity. Drawing on a common political heritage from the French Revolution, they were, nonetheless, divided on what the Revolution stood for and what type of society it defined. This schism took on broader applications when construed within the context of modernist thinking. Radicals, laying a heavy emphasis upon revolutionary methods and harkening back to the First Republic and the revolutionary dictatorship presided over by the Jacobins during the Convention of the early 1790s, cultivated a strict materialism in their political thinking which comported with their idealized vision of society and militant brand of atheism. Moderates seeking to purge republicanism of its cult of violence and make it appealing to

³⁶ Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1952), 125.

a broader range of the French public, especially the liberal-minded bourgeoisie, spurned the “metaphysical” utopias endemic to revolutionary ideology which were founded on idealistic notions of immediate social change and force. The *jeunes républicains*, many of them influenced by Comte’s Positivism, offered a more rational and comprehensive social program, utilizing scientific analysis to form a conception of society based on the sociologically possible.

Thus, while Republicans upheld certain traditional beliefs—such as the centrality of reason, the critical role of education in developing the individual, and a connection with *les peuples*, the mass of active citizens in society—³⁷disparity between the scientific realism of moderates and dialectical reasoning of radicals sharply divided the movement. As Republicans increasingly came to define their cause within the context of the scientific mentality growing up under the Second Empire, it became evident that underlying theoretical contentions within intellectual circles marked divergences within ideological parameters as well. By the end of the empire, the disunity of Republicans had become acute. “The Empire is falling apart,” stated Jules Clamag ran in 1869. “After it, there is a general sense that only the Republic is possible. But the Republic with whom?”³⁸

The uncertainty expressed by Clamag ran was widespread. A feeling of imminent change permeated the atmosphere of the 1860s, filling some with anxiety, fear, and misgivings for the future. Others could only close their eyes and hope for the best. “The political situation grows bleaker everyday,” claimed L on Gambetta in 1862. “One hears

³⁷ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 65-66.

³⁸ Jules Clamag ran, *Correspondance* (Paris: Alcan, 1906), 318.

ominous cracking sounds It is a time for heaving the lead, to find out where we are and whither we are going. Towards a change, that is certain; God grant it may be a useful change and a good one!”³⁹ Whether apprehensive or hopeful, the sense that change was imperative appeared omnipresent. Modernity, already a presence in the popular imagination, now required the social and political accoutrements to make it a living reality.

Yet the Second Empire was unprepared to take such a leap. Doubts and anxieties continued to plague the regime. Standing between two worlds, the government of Napoleon III adopted palliatives, seeking to please everybody while, in reality, pleasing nobody. As Emile Zola noted, “Half measures are dangerous. They kill governments.”⁴⁰ Such became the epitaph of the imperial regime.

³⁹ Quoted in Paul Deschanel, *Gambetta* (London: William Heinemann, 1920), 11.

⁴⁰ Emile Zola, *La Tribune* (20 December 1868), quoted in Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 195.

Chapter One

The Apotheosis of Science

“It is no longer a matter of dreaming up the best form of government, since one is as good as another,” remarked the novelist Gustave Flaubert in 1869, “but of ensuring that Science prevails. That is the most pressing matter.”⁴¹ Flaubert’s pronouncement may appear odd at first. Having lived through the political upheavals of 1848 and the Napoleonic coup of *Deux-Décembre*, the author was witness to some of the most gruesome displays of political instability and anxieties during the nineteenth century. Yet such a profession was by no means unique. At the end of the Second Empire, it appeared that science had become a ubiquitous topic, spanning a broad range of French thought and eclipsing other contemporary concerns. Pierre Dupont, a romantic poet and songwriter, was optimistic over the prospects the future held, writing “it is necessary to break with false traditions and bring forth into the world, through labor, through science, and through love, the reign of truth.”⁴² The poet Louis Ménard seemed to be equally in the spirit of the era when he exclaimed, “the new age begins. *Adieu* divine faith! Man has closed his heart; he has sacrificed love to science.”⁴³

⁴¹ Alphonse Jacobs, ed., *Flaubert-Sand: The Correspondence* (Great Britain: Harper Collins, 1993), 152.

⁴² Pierre Dupont, *Chants et chansons* (Paris: A. Houssiaux, 1855), 1:24.

⁴³ Louis Ménard, “Prométhée délivré,” *Poèmes et reveries d’un païen mystique* (Paris: Librairie de L’art indépendant, 1895), 36.

The myriad references to “science” during the Second Empire imputed a certain irrefutability and neoteric appeal which both intellectuals and officials alike were eager to attribute to their theories and judgments. Notions of progress and advancement popularized during the 1850s and 1860s signified the awakening of a scientific mentality in the consciousness of the period, one that was given a great impetus by the onset of the industrial revolution during these two decades. By 1870, there existed a shared feeling among intellectuals that they were moving toward a more modern conception of the world, one based on the objective reasoning and analysis of science that differed greatly from the outlook of past. In *The Sentimental Education*, Flaubert chose the image of Jesus Christ riding a steam engine through a virgin forest to symbolize this new sense of dislocation and modernity, conveying an irrevocable break with standard traditions and perceptions.⁴⁴ The poet Charles Baudelaire was equally conscious of a distinct feeling in his own time that a certain way of life in France was coming to an end. “It seems to me, lulled by this monotonous pounding, that someone somewhere is hastily nailing down a coffin. For whom? Yesterday it was summer; now here is autumn! The mysterious sound seems to announce a departure.”⁴⁵ In an age of industrialization and discovery, a clear conception of modernity was seizing the imagination. Science—both literally and figuratively—became an expression of this modernity, connoting change, innovation and the awareness of a particular *Zeitgeist* characterizing the era.

“Ask any good Frenchmen what he understands by ‘progress,’” claimed Baudelaire. “He will answer that it is steam, electricity, and gas—miracles unknown to

⁴⁴ Gustave Flaubert, *The Sentimental Education*, trans., Douglass Parmée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 325.

⁴⁵ Charles Baudelaire, “Chant d’Automne,” *Selected Poems*, trans., Carol Clark (New York: Penguin, 1995), 65.

the Romans—whose discovery bears full witness to our superiority over the ancients.”⁴⁶

Under the Second Empire, scientific and material progress increasingly came to be associated with the process of industrialization. Inspired by the industrial prowess of Great Britain, Emperor Napoleon III eagerly promoted the construction of railroads and mechanized production methods to stimulate the national economy and develop French domestic industry. Under his administration, the advent of steam power, the adoption of modern technologies in the manufacturing industries, and the laying of some 13,000 kilometres of operational rail line provided the impetus for systemic economic growth throughout the 1850s.⁴⁷ At the inauguration of a new rail line running from Nantes to Lorient, the prefect of the Morbihan praised the government for these new technological advances, claiming “it is to the Emperor, to his generous and patriotic plans, to his ardent love for all which can be useful to the country, that we owe this complete network crossing Brittany in every direction.”⁴⁸ Victor Duruy, education minister from 1863 to 1869, was ecstatic over the displays of French industrial ingenuity at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1867. “[The] wealth of industry flows,” he remarked upon seeing such wonders, “like a river from its source, out of the chemist’s laboratory and the physicist’s and naturalist’s study.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Charles Baudelaire, “Exposition universelle, 1855,” *Art in Paris: 1845-1862*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1965), 126.

⁴⁷ David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 79, 236; Jean-Charles Asselain, *Histoire économique de la révolution industrielle à la première guerre mondiale* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985), 106-07.

⁴⁸ *Le Constitutionnel* (25 September 1862), in Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics*, 87.

⁴⁹ George Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France, 1863-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 91.

As Duruy's claim made evident, the material benefits brought about by the industrial revolution were associated with new advances in technology and scientific knowledge during the nineteenth century. The journalist Eugène Pelletan exalted the "applied sciences" as the "soul of industry," which exhibited a dynamism "superior to simple machines and as different as the motor is to a crude tool."⁵⁰ In the 1850s, Louis Pasteur, serving as dean of the faculty of science at Lille, undertook a study examining the possible mutual areas of interest between the scientific and industrial communities.⁵¹ Yet in a lecture to his students, Pasteur stated, "It is especially essential that you not share the opinions of those narrow minds who disdain everything in science which has no immediate application."⁵² Like many of his contemporaries, Pasteur believed that science should not only be employed for the advancement of particular national interests. In the popular imagination, science signified a new guiding principle which hailed the beginning of a modern age with seemingly unlimited potential. By 1859, the feeling of modernisation seizing France inspired the magazine *La Vie moderne* to print a poem claiming:

Time has doubled its course
Humanity rushes headlong
All the roads have become short
The ocean no longer has any limits at all.

Life was long in the days of old
On the slope it was dragged along

⁵⁰ Elliot Mansfield Grant, *French Industry and Modern Industry 1830-1870: A Study of the Treatment of Industry and Mechanical Power in French Poetry During the Reigns of Louis-Philippe and Napoleon III* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 78.

⁵¹ Harry W. Paul, *From Knowledge to Power: The Rise of the Science Empire in France, 1860-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 137.

⁵² Roger L. Williams, *Gaslight and Shadows: The World of Napoleon III, 1851-1870* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 167.

We now live more in one month
Than our ancestors lived in one year.⁵³

The tangible manifestations of science and progress were producing a distinct feeling of modernity within French consciousness during the Second Empire, a mentality fostering a conception of a world vastly different from that of the past.

Despite the popular appeal of such notions, the new outlook inspired by rapid industrialization, the growth of capital, and the spread of scientific knowledge was more prominent to the expectations of some groups rather than others. An explicit correlation between the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie of the urban middle classes and popular conceptions of modernity was readily discernible. The distinct identity, culture, and ideology associated with the French bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century emerged in the wake of the 1830 revolution with the founding of the July Monarchy. Broadly defined, the bourgeoisie included property owners, industrialists, and men of independent means who represented an elite social group with political rights granted by virtue of their wealth.⁵⁴ With the declaration of universal manhood suffrage in 1848 and the dual processes of industrial growth and capital accumulation carried out under the Second Empire, however, the predominating *haute bourgeoisie* of the July Monarchy quickly discovered that their world of privilege and exclusivity was nearing an end.

The expansion of industry and capital under Napoleon III not only brought material benefits to France but also served to alter the nation's social structure profoundly. By the mid-1850s, bourgeois and middle-class parvenus were beginning to

⁵³ Quoted in Anne Coffin Hanson, *Manet and the Modernist Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 13.

⁵⁴ David Garrioch, *The Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie, 1690-1830* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 266.

make their presence known. These new arrivals were not necessarily the traditional magnates of the *haute bourgeoisie*. They were urban entrepreneurs and producers profiting from the current industrialization, as well as professionals, academics, and metropolitan property owners: in short, a new middling strata of industrialists, *petit bourgeois* business men, lawyers, doctors, and intellectuals quite distinct from their Orléanist counterparts.⁵⁵ Whereas the political cartoonist Honoré Daumier had once described the bourgeoisie as “the new royalty,”⁵⁶ the parvenu of the Second Empire came of age in a France which was considerably more democratic, better informed due to an increase in literacy and print culture, and rapidly urbanizing. Thus, the culture of the new middle classes seeking primacy under the imperial regime was far more public-oriented and centered around urban life than the elites of the July Monarchy.⁵⁷

Yet if the customs and habits of the bourgeoisie were being appropriated and transformed by a rising middle class with new styles and forms of social life, so too were the traditional values and social perceptions cultivated by Orléanist elites during the 1830s and 1840s. The core tenets of bourgeois ideology had maintained a respect for law and political order, the importance of education, the need for economic stability, and a belief in the value of individual initiative.⁵⁸ Prior to the Second Empire, however, French industry remained significantly underdeveloped, as economic cycles of boom-and-bust and adherence to *laissez-faire* economic policies repeatedly discouraged government

⁵⁵ Christophe Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France au XIXeme siècle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991), 130-33.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois*, 99.

⁵⁷ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 50-60; Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 3-4.

⁵⁸ Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 168.

initiative in the national economy. With the ambitious policies of Napoleon III, a new capitalist ethos was born, as increasing wealth generated through trade, domestic manufacturing, and the stock market fostered notions of a durable progress and integrated a greater sector of the French population into the broadening middle class.⁵⁹ The centrality of the industrial world to the bourgeois parvenus of the 1850s and the need for an intellectual system capable of rationalizing a belief in continual progress came together in a new world-view predicated on the possibilities of human advancement and the benefits of scientific knowledge. Contact between the industrial and scientific communities served, in part, to strengthen such conceptions, as men like Louis Pasteur and the physicist Auguste Lamy collaborated with capitalists and leading industrial societies during the empire.⁶⁰

As cultural elites and intellectuals, many of whom were affiliated with the growing middle class of the Second Empire, popularized notions of change, science, and progress, the relationship between conceptions of modernity and the outlook of the urban middle classes also became apparent. Designating science and progress as powerful forces which would play an instrumental role in shaping the future, savants and academics conveyed their ideas through a discourse or mode of conceptualization complimentary to the developing world-view of the new social groups attaining primacy under the Second Empire. In affirming that France was moving toward an era of culture and understanding quite different from that of the past, they constructed an interpretation of modern life and sensibility which reflected the fundamental ideals and values of the

⁵⁹ Guy P. Palmade, *French Capitalism in the Nineteenth Century*, trans., Graeme M. Holmes (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), 122-24.

⁶⁰ Paul, *From Knowledge to Power*, 135-37.

new social order. Thus, in the language and reasoning of intellectual elites, modernity constituted a perception of the world defined by the ambitions and attitudes of bourgeois urbanites.

Integrating these conceptions of progress and innovation into a logical system of thought, savants and academics focused their attention on the possibilities offered by science and its potential to generate a more modern outlook in French intellectual life. The abstract and metaphysical notions popularized by the Romantic generation appeared antiquated and no longer capable of sustaining belief; new principles were needed, grounded firmly in objectivity and suitable for a modern and scientific age. Science became, henceforth, the promise of a new enlightenment, and intellectuals did not hesitate in apotheosizing the scope of its applications.

The disregard for the dogmatic and abstract concerns of the Romantics welcomed an analysis based upon a “strict adherence to fact.”⁶¹ Knowledge could only be attained through observation and experiment, defying the *a priori* reasoning intrinsic to metaphysical speculation. “The experimental method is the really scientific method,” stated Claude Bernard, chair of medicine at the Collège de France, “which proclaims the freedom of the human spirit and its intelligence. It not only shakes off the yoke of metaphysics and of theology, in addition it refuses to admit personal considerations and subjective standpoints.”⁶² In essence, as Auguste Comte claimed, what was being proposed was “studying the *How* instead of the *Why*.”⁶³

⁶¹ Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J. H. Bridges (London: Trubner, 1865), 18.

⁶² J. Alexander Gunn, *Modern French Philosophy: A Study of the Development Since Comte* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1922), 101.

⁶³ Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 49.

In announcing this radical doctrine, savants were consciously rebelling against the leading intellectual precept of the preceding generation, that of Victor Cousin's Eclecticism. A graduate from the modern university system established by the Empire, the *Université*, Cousin stood as a symbol of the meritocratic ideal of the Napoleonic imperial order as he achieved renown through various academic prizes and awards. A moderate liberal who refrained from vocalizing his contempt for the reactionary ultra-royalists during the Restoration, he was given a post at the *École Normale Supérieure* where he could lecture on his novel philosophical theories. Cousin's oratorical skills were, however, neither reserved for mere philosophy nor relegated to lecture halls. When not under the watchful eye of the education inspectors, his show of prudent restraint was abandoned. In the conspiratorial drawing rooms and secret meeting houses prevalent during the Restoration era, Cousin encouraged his students to support liberty and the constitutional Charter imposed upon the Bourbon Monarchy.⁶⁴ Progressive in his political beliefs and modern in his intellectual outlook, Cousin quickly became recognized as a new leading voice of the Romantic generation whose fortunes would come with the triumph of liberalism in 1830 and the founding of the July Monarchy.

Despite his discerning political acumen, Cousin's mark would be most pronounced in academic pursuits. His philosophy of Eclecticism rested on the principles of German Idealism, flouting the more social-minded thinking of the eighteenth-century French *philosophes*. There were, Cousin maintained, "independent truths" which lay outside of human cognition and constituted "laws of reason in themselves."⁶⁵ These

⁶⁴ Alan B. Spitzer, *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 227-29; Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820*, 76.

⁶⁵ Victor Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, 3rd Ed. (Paris: Ledgrange, 1838), 1:60-62.

truths were eternal, leaving the individual to discover them through the use of the intellect. Reflection and introspection transformed these eternal truths into distinct concepts which one could then recognize as absolute laws. This Kantian framework led Cousin to believe that he could reconstitute “eternal truths with contemporary conceptions [. . . and] attain the universal through the experimental method.”⁶⁶ By acknowledging the existence of absolute concepts, Cousin was easily capable of linking them to God. “Reason is God looking down upon man,” he claimed, “and revealing Himself to man under the form of absolute truth.”⁶⁷ Philosophy and religion, by Cousin’s understanding, strove toward the same ends. “It is always bad philosophy and bad theology,” he contended, “which quarrel with one another.”⁶⁸

Such a philosophy, although liberal in its orientation, was acceptable to the Catholic Church due to its emphasis upon the spiritual and the moral, as well as its disinterest in concrete scientific principles. In addition to the clergy’s tepid acceptance, the students attending Cousin’s classes exhibited a passionate enthusiasm for his novel approach to philosophy. The principles of Eclecticism were comforting to a generation of young Frenchmen who had experienced profound social dislocation following the political upheaval of the Revolution and the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire. The world which they had come to know had suddenly been pulled out from under them with Napoleon’s defeat in 1814, and Cousin’s belief in the eternal and absolute was a welcome relief to these disillusioned youths. Eclecticism presented a “spiritual rebirth,” according to one of Cousin’s followers, a hope and confidence in immutable truths beyond the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1:57.

⁶⁷ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *History of Modern Philosophy in France* (Chicago: Open Court, 1924), 336.

⁶⁸ Victor Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, 1:38.

ambit of a world turned on its head.⁶⁹ The popularity of Cousin's metaphysics continued into the July Monarchy, where they became enshrined in academia with his appointment to the education ministry. Eclecticism developed into the dominant mode of academic and philosophical discourse, indoctrinating a generation educated within the French lycées and universities during the 1820s and 1830s.

By the late 1840s, however, criticism from the intellectual community augured a changing of the guard. Launching into one of his characteristic attacks, Hippolyte Taine impugned Cousin for his "preference for morality" which "suppressed" true philosophical reasoning and scientific inquiry. Eclecticism was "a heap of inaccurate phrases, of lame reasoning and obvious equivocations."⁷⁰ Auguste Comte accused the academic doyen of misconstruing and "diluting" certain aspects of German philosophy in his lectures.⁷¹ "There is nothing absolute in this world," he claimed, "everything is relative."⁷² As well as being outmoded, Eclecticism was also accused of falling short of its aim. Viewing Cousin's failure as characteristic of the entire generation he symbolized, Ernest Renan noted: "The generation that preceded ours, the one that was launched in 1815 and attained maturity in 1830, carried with it virtually limitless aspirations It saw itself called to a task of renewal, and as if humanity was to be reborn with it, it was confident that it could inaugurate in its century a new literature, a new philosophy, a new history, and a new art. It has not delivered all that it had promised; it had promised the infinite; it

⁶⁹ Doris Goldsetin, "Official Philosophies in Modern France: The Example of Victor Cousin," *Journal of Social History*, 1 (Spring 1968): 261; Alan B. Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820*, 90-91.

⁷⁰ Hippolyte Taine, *Les philosophes classique du XIXe siècle en France* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1905), 292.

⁷¹ Auguste Comte, *Correspondance générale et confessions*, ed., Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro and Pierre Arnaud (Paris: Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études, 1973), 1:132.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:37.

has not renewed the human spirit; this is a more difficult task than was at first believed.”⁷³ For these new thinkers Cousin was nothing more than “an orator” who, “like orators in general,” lacked “sufficient truth.”⁷⁴

The venomous charges levied against Cousin’s Eclecticism were indicative of the changing intellectual atmosphere under the Second Empire. The intangible nature of metaphysics no longer seemed relevant to an age in which scientific breakthroughs were revealing the importance of studying the physical world. Nor could religious dogma be accepted as irrefutably valid. “A life spent in the pursuit of science is as good as a life spent in the practice of virtue,” averred Renan, illustrating his newfound appreciation for the sciences over Catholicism.⁷⁵ More pointedly, Comte saw religious dogmatism as an obstacle to man’s pursuit of knowledge and asserted that “no important step in the progress of Humanity can now be made without totally abandoning the theological principle.”⁷⁶

Auguste Comte, whose rejection of Cousin’s theories had never aroused substantial interest in his youth, now found himself the paladin of this new movement taking shape. “[The] real part of my life is like a novel,” he once wrote, “a powerful novel which would seem extraordinary, if ever I published it with fictitious names.”⁷⁷ If Comte saw his life as a novel, it was one characterized by frustration, volatile emotion, and destitution. His periods of brilliance and insight were punctuated with pressing economic hardships, marital difficulties, and bouts of insanity, revealing in his work both

⁷³ Ernest Renan, “M. Cousin,” quoted in Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820*, 273.

⁷⁴ D. G. Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France*, 15.

⁷⁵ Ernest Renan, *The Future of Science*, 5.

⁷⁶ Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 20.

⁷⁷ Comte, *Correspondance générale et confessions*, 1:163.

the systematic ratiocination of a sharp intellect and the garbled ramblings of a man slowly going mad. Comte possessed, nonetheless, a consistent vision, an overarching optimism in the potential of scientific thinking.

Born in Hérault to royalist parents, he spent his formative years in the provincial district where his father worked as a municipal official. Sent to Paris to attend the *École polytechnique* at the age of sixteen, the young student showed a diligent precocity in science and mathematics. While studious, he was also unruly and was constantly singled out as the ringleader of student radicals protesting against the Bourbon monarchy. His persistent rowdiness ensured that he never finished his degree, a consequence that would haunt him later in life when he lacked the qualifications to hold any serious academic position and draw a regular salary. Earning a meagre living through private tutorials and translation, Comte eventually found steady employment as the secretary to Count Henri de Saint-Simon in 1818. In procuring the position, the course of the young man's life changed irrevocably, as the quasi-mystic and philosopher exercised an important influence on Comte's impressionable mind.⁷⁸

A forerunner of socialism, Saint-Simon had amassed a loyal following of young acolytes devoted to his philosophical teachings and guidance. His "utopian" theories heralded the creation of a new age in which man mastered applicable social laws and used industry to promote efficiency and communal equality. Aristocratic property owners, who were "a horde of parasites" in Saint-Simon's eyes, would be replaced by a technocratic elite to administer the state, while scientists and artists provided it with spiritual substance. This "trinity" of industrialists, savants, and creators was composed of

⁷⁸ Arline Reilein Standley, *Auguste Comte* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), 18-20.

all those who would contribute to the moral and technological progress of a society built upon the ruins of a post-Revolutionary world.⁷⁹ From Saint-Simon, Comte formed his beliefs in the industrial nature of modern states, the future of scientific methodologies, and the need for a spiritual and social system to order society. The socialist prophet lacked, however, a systematic method by which to actuate his ideas, a feature which Comte did not fail to point out, and when an argument over publication credit arose between the mystical leader and his young *élève* in 1824, Comte broke with Saint-Simon and set out on his own course.⁸⁰

The ruptured friendship with his intellectual mentor was only one of the many crises facing Comte as he set to work. His economic position was precarious, and conjugal relations with his wife were at their nadir. His marriage to Caroline Massin, a prostitute with whom Comte had fallen in love while tutoring her in mathematics, had upset his parents. Comte's mother continually pestered her son to have the marriage officially recognized by the church and, though giving in to his mother's wishes, Comte unleashed a vehement anticlerical tirade during the ceremony as the priest delivered his blessings. In an act of rebellion, he signed the marriage certificate Brutus Bonaparte Comte. His mental health was deteriorating rapidly by this point, and Comte became irascible as he worked feverishly on his book night and day. He flung knives at his wife during arguments when Caroline threatened returning to her former line of work to stave off poverty; he struck friends who corrected him; one evening, he attempted to commit suicide by jumping into the Seine. In 1826, Comte spent eight months in a clinical

⁷⁹ J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase* (London: Seckert and Warburg, 1960), 64; Alan B. Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820*, 154-56; Lévy-Bruhl, *History of Modern Philosophy in France*, 355.

⁸⁰ Standley, *Auguste Comte*, 34-36.

asylum suffering from dementia. By 1830, penury, marital difficulties, and madness had taken their toll. Through this tempestuous maelstrom, however, he found the resolve to continue promoting his work. While in the clutches of madness and hysteria, he developed his philosophical system of Positivism, revealing a desire for the order and logic which he could not find in his own life.⁸¹

Comte's philosophical Positivism defined a new theory of epistemology that rejected knowledge *a priori* and emphasized the importance of empirically verified data. "[We] regard the search after what we call *causes*, whether first or final, as absolutely inaccessible and unmeaning," Comte contended, stressing that one can "only try to analyze correctly the circumstances of their production, and to connect them together by normal relations of succession and similarity." Causality was beyond the realm of human intellect because its existence could not be verified through directly observed phenomena. It was, according to Comte, "insoluble and outside the domain of Positive Philosophy."⁸² The repudiation of metaphysical epistemology provided Comte with the basis to articulate his entire philosophical system. It was not solely an epistemological revolution he hoped to bring forth. From his days as an acolyte of Saint-Simon, he had learned to see science as a transformative force within society, one capable of defining a new world order: "Science, from which prescience [*prévoyance*]; prescience, from which action."⁸³

Critical to Comte's vision was a belief in natural development, portending the awakening of man's true intellect. The advent of the positivistic age, the epoch in which Comte believed himself to be living, was the product of historical progress that

⁸¹ Ibid., 20-21.

⁸² Auguste Comte, *The Fundamental Principles of the Positive Philosophy*, trans. Paul Descours (London: Watts, 1905), 26.

⁸³ Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France*, 34.

consummated a three-fold scheme of human consciousness. Initially, man's existence and the natural world had been structured through a purely theological understanding. The Enlightenment had replaced the theological with the metaphysical, a stage which continued to search for primary cause and absolute knowledge but which only resulted in replacing the supernatural with abstract and idealized reasoning. Positivism signified the third and final stage of the developing consciousness in which man sought a "relative" knowledge through observable phenomena.⁸⁴ Man had thereby attained the perfection of his intellect and his inquisitive spirit. What was left to do, however, was apply the precepts of the positivistic age to current social problems, creating a "Social Physics" capable of rejuvenating a moribund world threatened with instability and dissolution.⁸⁵ He was asking scientists to turn their microscopes onto the social organism and foster a unified science which sought the natural laws governing society.

By his death in 1857, Comte's influence upon elite intellectual circles in France had produced excitement over the prospects of a burgeoning philosophical revolution focused on the material sciences. "Philosophy seems to aspire to what it was at its origins," wrote Renan, "the universal science."⁸⁶ Emile Littré, one of Comte's most dedicated disciples until the 1850s, claimed that prior to his discovery of Positivism, he, like many of his generation, had become disillusioned with the theological and metaphysical systems of French philosophy. Notwithstanding the differences which

⁸⁴ Comte, *Fundamental Principles*, 22-25; Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France*, 27-32.

⁸⁵ Comte, *Fundamental Principles*, 29.

⁸⁶ Ernest Renan, "La métaphysique et son avenir," *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques*, 12th Ed. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1925), 265.

eventually led him to the break with his intellectual mentor, Littré affirmed until the end of his life that “the work of M. Comte transformed me.”⁸⁷

Despite the enthusiasm of intellectual elites, academics and officials, many still under the influence of Cousin’s Eclecticism, expressed skepticism over the prospects of Positivism. A headmaster presenting an academic prize in 1853 used the occasion to voice his contempt for the study of the material sciences, stating “The exclusive study of material science means materialism; materialism means socialism; socialism put into practice means the total destruction of society.”⁸⁸ “We know little of laws and nature and of their harmony, no doubt, in comparison to the science which God possess and which is reserved to him alone,” avowed Henri Ducrotay de Blainville, a member of the Académie des Sciences. God gave man the faculties to deduce natural phenomena, according to Blainville, “so that we may conceive of the perfection of His work.”⁸⁹ The philosopher Paul Janet, in his critique of German materialism, blamed “illusion and pride” for the belief that man could subject the natural world to his own understanding. “Things are deeper than our mind;” he continued, “No doubt, matter and mind must have a common reason in the thought of God, and there it is that we should seek their ultimate utility.”⁹⁰

The growing interest in scientific knowledge did not, however, automatically preclude religious and spiritual concerns, as many accused. In his later thinking, Comte had recognized the void which science alone represented and insisted upon the necessity

⁸⁷ Quoted in Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France*, 52.

⁸⁸ R. D. Anderson, *Education in France, 1848-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 114.

⁸⁹ M. H. de Blainville, *Histoire des sciences de l’organisation et de leur progress comme base de la philosophie* (Paris: Jacques Lecoffre, 1858), xxv-xxvi.

⁹⁰ Paul Janet, *The Materialism of the Present Day: A Critique of Dr. Buechner’s System* (London: Williams & Northgate, 1867), xii.

of a spiritual presence within his philosophy. In addition to its purely scientific attributes, according to Comte, positivism was capable of evoking a “state of complete harmony peculiar to human life, in its collective as well as in its individual form, when all the parts of Life are ordered in their natural relations to each other.”⁹¹ The journalist Auguste Nefftzer, who became intrigued by Comte’s philosophy in the 1850s, was convinced that “every sincere expression of the human spirit has a deeply religious and Christian character” and that religion and science need not be antagonistic.⁹² Religion and spirituality continued to play important roles in the nineteenth-century consciousness and could not simply be dismissed as impracticable with the advent of scientific knowledge and objective theory. “We must proceed with proudly uplifted heads,” the theologian Ernest Renan urged, “and fearlessly [go] towards that which is ours and when we do violence to things in order to drag their secrets from them, feel perfectly convinced that we are acting for ourselves, for them and for God.”⁹³

The spiritual dimensions of science were of special importance to Renan, a man who had spent half his life in search of a god who constantly defied his scrupulous investigations. The product of such a visceral struggle, in which faith was combatted by reason, produced an originality and insight in Renan that would be revealed in his later writings, both philosophical and theological. Although influenced by Comte’s Religion of Humanity, Renan’s efforts to integrate the spiritual and the scientific would far transcend Comte’s pseudo-Christianity. Comte had adopted religion as a means toward his realization of a new world, preserving ceremonies and customs with a certain artificiality.

⁹¹ Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, trans. J. H. Bridges (London: Longmans-Green, 1875), 2:8.

⁹² Auguste Nefftzer, *Le Temps* (3 December 1861), quoted in Bertocci, *Jules Simon*, 25.

⁹³ Renan, *The Future of Science*, 14.

For Renan, the spiritual was an end in itself, a product of the “human spirit” which seeks higher truth.⁹⁴

A Breton from poverty-stricken Tréguier, Renan had received an education through the Catholic Church, the only means accessible to a destitute child like himself. In 1832, he began a formal education at the local *collège ecclésiastique* with the intention of entering the priesthood. His hard work earned him a scholarship to the seminary school of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonne in Paris after the abbé Félix Dupanloup took notice of his academic achievements. Upon his sister Henriette’s urging, the young Renan began reading German philosophy and theology, sparking a lifelong interest which would eventually lead to his renunciation of the Church. “It was there that I found what I was looking for,” Renan reflected in his *souvenirs*, “the reconciliation of a highly religious spirit with the critical spirit.”⁹⁵ In 1843, he entered the ecclesiastical school of Saint-Sulpice to continue his education and prepare for a vocation in the priesthood. Once there, however, his thoughts became persistently occupied with “the rational verification of Christianity.”⁹⁶ His growing interest in German scholarship and scientific ideas henceforth served as an obstacle to the spiritual quest which filled his young mind.

Although a man of strong spiritual conviction, Renan felt that man’s inherent reason did not permit blind faith. He desired a sign, a way in which logically to ground his own system of Catholic beliefs. During nights of piercing introspection, Renan would recite a prayer he had written: “I suffer, O Jesus, through having raised the problem of your existence.” Despite agonizing self-scrutiny and incantatory prayer, he remained

⁹⁴ Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France*, 105-06.

⁹⁵ Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d’Enfance et de Jeunesse* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1923), 256.

⁹⁶ H. W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography* (London: Althone, 1964), 18.

unable to reconcile his belief in God with his own uncertainty. Frustrated, he tersely remarked to his spiritual advisor at Saint-Sulpice in 1845, “God has betrayed me, Monsieur.”⁹⁷

He left the seminary shortly afterward, taking up an independent teaching position where he quietly mused over his sense of growing despair. He empathized with Faust, whose own plight had portrayed the “torments of doubt.” In a world devoid of spiritual presence, Renan seemed capable only of focusing on his personal suffering like a monk in the throes of spiritual catharsis. His skepticism was a source of affliction, but a deeply moving one which signified his visceral torments and quest to commune with the absolute and the true. “Suffering inwardly for the sake of truth,” he wrote, “proves abundantly that one loves it and makes one out as being of the elect.”⁹⁸ Observing Parisian workers fraternizing while on a break, he remarked: “At least I have gained something by not being able to share in such futile pleasures. Was I right? Is it a gain, not to be able to enjoy something? Yes it is, whatever I may feel to the contrary.” Visiting the Benedictine cloister of Monte Cassino on a trip to Italy in 1849, Renan would claim, “I understand the monastery, that civilization which seeks refuge in the rocky places of the earth.”⁹⁹ He understood it because the monastic ethic accorded with his own sense of asceticism, idealism, and rationalism. He, like Christ, was suffering, his pain symbolic of a higher ideal, his belief in the spiritual seeking confirmation.

The June Days of 1848 gave Renan his spiritual closure. Caught up in the frenzy of insurrectionary Paris, he viewed the violent conflict in apocalyptic terms as he watched

⁹⁷ Renan, *Souvenirs d'Enfance*, 244.

⁹⁸ Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 25.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, 57.

man reveal his “primitive instincts.” The carnage and butchery crystallized in his mind a need to promote the moral and material betterment of mankind which would lead it towards the absolute. Overflowing with a newfound optimism, Renan secreted himself away in his quarters and wrote *The Future of Science*. It was to serve as a new bible and Renan was to be the “intellectual messiah” of a new religion.¹⁰⁰

Possessing deeply-rooted spiritual principles, Renan saw faith as vital and necessary to human life. It was what gave life meaning, saving it from frivolity, egotism, and skepticism. Spirituality drove man to seek a higher calling and truth, and the attainment of these higher truths was made possible by science in the modern world. It was a means to the universal and infinite, just as religion and metaphysics had been in previous ages. Through his personal studies of the sciences, Renan came to equate the objective of science with that of the religious spirit, bestowing on man “the divine ideal which alone gives the prize to human existence.”¹⁰¹ The spiritual and the philosophical, therefore, were inextricable to Renan. Truth was unattainable through *a priori* reasoning, as his religious skepticism had made apparent. It had to be accurate and verifiable, a prospect which science held and dogmatic theology did not. “Science alone supplies mankind with those vital truths,” he declared, “without which life would be unbearable and society impossible.”¹⁰²

Yet truth was not merely organized data drawn from scientific observation. It remained entwined with a spiritual quest. The goal of science was to study man and lead him towards a higher consciousness through which he would be able to realize God.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰¹ Renan, *The Future of Science*, 91.

¹⁰² Ibid., 31.

Under this Hegelian conception of human consciousness, Renan was not confirming the existence of a divine entity with which man sought to commune. “God is the product of conscience,” he claimed, “not of science and metaphysics.”¹⁰³ Devising a reciprocal relationship between man and the divine, Renan believed God to be the entirety of human consciousness, “total existence and at the same time the absolute.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, science would deliver man to God while, simultaneously and almost paradoxically, God was coming into existence through man’s expanding consciousness.¹⁰⁵

In the midst of skepticism, Renan had discovered a way in which to reconcile faith with reason, spirituality with science. The emptiness left by cynicism was replenished through a new resilience and purpose. Renan’s spiritual struggle had been personal but at the same time indicative of the malaise characterizing his own epoch. With his salvation came that of the world. “For us the die is cast,” he insisted, “and even should superstition and frivolity, henceforth inseparable auxiliaries, succeed in deadening human conscience for a time, it will be said in the nineteenth century, the century of fear, that there were still men, who, in spite of common contempt, liked to be called men of the other world; men who believed in the truth, who were ardent in its search, in the midst of an age, frivolous because it was without faith and superstitious because it was frivolous.”¹⁰⁶ Science was the germ of a new faith, an alternative dogma for a more modern age. The perfection of the individual, the progress of mankind, and the encompassing of the universal, all attributes once ascribed to religion, were inextricable from the fundamental purpose of scientific principles.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 323.

¹⁰⁴ Renan, *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques*, 184.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰⁶ Renan, *The Future of Science*, 459.

Not everyone expressing enthusiasm over the new scientific outlook was as spiritual as Renan. On the contrary, a strong conviction in the virtue of scientific knowledge often placed intellectuals in opposition to religious doctrine. “Nature is God,” proclaimed Hippolyte Taine, “the real God.”¹⁰⁷ “My faith in religion was the first thing to fall before the spirit of inquiry,” Taine wrote while still a student. “One doubt led to another, each disbelief dragging another down with it in its fall.”¹⁰⁸ This skepticism could, at times, express itself in an aggressive manner, leading to accusations of anticlericalism and militant atheism by his contemporaries. “Taine was openly hostile, not only against Catholicism, but against Christianity as well,” noted Juliette Adam, a moderate Republican who held a certain disdain for the scholar. “The bishops and prefects were, in the eyes of the great philosopher-critic, as people call him, the instruments of the same despotism.”¹⁰⁹ His faith undermined by doubt, Taine sought solace in philosophy and there discovered Spinoza, a philosopher who had a great influence on his young mind.¹¹⁰ Through Spinoza’s “*more geometrico*,” [geometric method] Taine began to formulate a vision of the universal and absolute, a hallmark of his more mature philosophical thinking. The experience was enlightening; the young scholar felt he had reached a height at which he could “embrace the entire philosophical horizon.”¹¹¹

Beginning his studies at the École Normale Supérieure in 1848, Taine showed a promising future. A dedicated student, he was praised by his teachers for his innovative

¹⁰⁷ Hippolyte Taine, *Sa vie et sa correspondance* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1902), 1:150.

¹⁰⁸ Taine, “De la destinée humaine,” *Sa vie et sa correspondance*, 1:21.

¹⁰⁹ Juliette Adam (Juliette Lamber), *Mes sentiments et nos idées avant 1870* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1905), 46-47.

¹¹⁰ Taine, “De la destinée humaine,” 1:25-26.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1:25.

thinking and comprehensive grasp of philosophy. It came as a shock, therefore, in 1851 when Taine failed his examination for the teaching *agrégation*. His interpretation of Spinoza's moral system deviated from the standard Eclectic analysis which instructors expected. Taine's innovative thinking suddenly became a hindrance to him, and as a result he was not granted his degree. "He was refused," protested his friend and fellow classmate Lucien Anatole Prévost-Paradol, "because he disdained the foolish declarations of Providence, of religious morality, of the necessity of religion . . . it is commonplace that the distinction of his spirit would have sufficed to confound theirs."¹¹² Although he received a doctorate on the less contentious topic of literature two years later, Taine never forgot the ignominy of failure nor forgave the obtuse rationale of mandarins dedicated to more orthodox interpretations of philosophy. The source of his attacks against Cousin's Eclecticism during his career would always be regarded in the light of this humiliation.¹¹³

Having failed the *agrégation* in 1851, Taine was forced to take up a routine teaching position in the provinces at the Collège de Nevers. There, he settled into a malaise. The damp weather affected his health; for enjoyment, all he had was his piano playing and lonely walks through the countryside. Finding nothing capable of stimulating his mind in the dreary provinces, Taine turned inward, keeping up his intense study of philosophy in ascetic solitude. "The more I enter into real life," he wrote to a friend, "the more it displeases me."¹¹⁴ He would never permit his cynical turn of mind, however, to

¹¹² Taine, *Sa vie et sa correspondance*, 1:127.

¹¹³ André Cresson, *Hippolyte Taine, sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), 4-6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

affect his work. “Being pessimistic or optimistic,” he declared, “that is permitted in poets and artists, but not in men who possess the scientific spirit.”¹¹⁵

Through his abhorrence for Eclecticism Taine became the leading figure of a new “scientism” which promoted objectivity, logical analysis, and experimentation. As a student of philosophy, he believed that scientific principles could be integrated into a comprehensive system of epistemology, employing the observation of phenomena in formulating a new metaphysics. Unlike Comte, Taine did not feel that scientific examination precluded metaphysics. The English Empiricists, who promoted the objective analysis of the natural world through sensory perception, were bound only to experimental data in Taine’s view. The German Idealists, on the other hand, virtually ignored the importance of experience and thought predominantly in terms of abstract principles and concepts which structured human understanding. In putting forth his “method,” Taine believed that these two antithetical schools of thoughts could be synthesized, engendering a metaphysics which could satisfy the expectations of a scientific age.¹¹⁶

Like Comte, Taine affirmed that it was through studying nature that man derived true knowledge of himself and his world, replacing superstition with hard data and empirical evidence. His method differed from Comte’s, however, in that he claimed man could derive the nature of causality from direct sensory experience through the process of abstraction. By analyzing commonalities in a select group of facts and discovering the causes governing them, one could form universal laws or axioms which served as a “generating formula” expressing “the interior and primordial cause of all its

¹¹⁵ Taine, *Sa vie et sa correspondance*, 4:333.

¹¹⁶ Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France*, 133-34.

properties.”¹¹⁷ By drawing broad conclusions of this nature through the process of abstraction, the essence of primary causality became manifest. “Everything is dependent upon the method,” Taine wrote, for it provided the “necessary conditions” to have a “series of true perceptions.”¹¹⁸

Unlike German Idealists such as Immanuel Kant, who posited that the individual projected intelligibility upon the outside world, Taine believed that the world itself *was* intelligible. Man was capable, therefore, of comprehending and verifying the natural world, viewing “like a single source unfolding itself from distinct and branching canals, the eternal torrent of events and the infinite sea of things [in themselves].”¹¹⁹ By establishing a scientific metaphysic, Taine avowed that man could gaze into the pith of the entire natural order, devising all causality through the existence of universal principles. “I am anything but skeptical,” he claimed. “I believe human intelligence has no limits . . . and we can know everything about man and life.” In essence, Taine’s method posited the existence of absolute knowledge outside of God. “At that instant the universe as we see it disappears. All facts have been reduced and replaced by formulas; the world becomes simple, science has come into being.”¹²⁰ There was, accordingly, “an art, a morality, a *politique*, a new religion” made possible by science and it remained man’s task to seek it.¹²¹

Taine’s method provided the groundwork for a reevaluation of established intellectual doctrines and justified the benefits of a purely scientific approach in

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 142.

¹¹⁸ Taine, *Sa vie et sa correspondance*, 1:116.

¹¹⁹ Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France*, 143.

¹²⁰ Taine, *Les philosophes classique*, 368.

¹²¹ Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France*, 153.

reconsidering them. His novel theories did not fail to provoke controversy in intellectual circles and by the mid 1860s Taine's notoriety could no longer be ignored. Shunned by academia and suffering a physical breakdown at the moment of his growing success in the late 1850s, Taine abandoned his intense work schedule and spent time traveling throughout France and Italy to recover his health. During the respite, he began to focus his attention on aesthetics, writing a series of works on both art and literature. His efforts were eventually rewarded when he was appointed Professor of Esthetics and Art History at the *École des Beaux-Arts* by Victor Duruy in 1864 as part of the education minister's reform policies. For the next six years, Taine's intellectual pursuits were absorbed by art and history, displaying the same ruthless antagonism toward established theories of aesthetics as he had in his philosophical studies.

Unsurprisingly, it was the theories of Victor Cousin that Taine once again sought to overturn. During his tenure at the Académie under the July Monarchy, Cousin had applied his system of Eclecticism to art, deeming it the "philosophy of the century." Believing that art existed solely for the purposes of beauty, Cousin affirmed that the artist must concern himself with the expression of the purest beauty, that of the ideal. "The ideal is the artist's object of passionate contemplation. Assiduously and silently meditated, unceasingly purified by reflection and vivid sentiment, it warms genius and inspires it with the irresistible need of seeing it realized and living." Moral beauty, according to Cousin, was the "foundation of all true beauty," with the artistic expression of morality realized in the fine arts through physical depictions. In striving to represent the pure and the ideal, moreover, the artist portrayed the outward manifestations of God, who made Himself evident through the idea of the true and the beautiful. "True beauty is

ideal beauty,” declared Cousin, “and ideal beauty is a reflection of the infinite.”¹²² Eclecticism expressed, therefore, the bourgeois desire for truth and beauty in art, rendering it a doctrine compatible with the ideals of the bourgeois *juste-milieu* which had dominated French society under the July Monarchy.

Contrary to Cousin’s belief in the eternal and moral qualities of beauty, Taine saw art as a social phenomenon which could be investigated via scientific methodologies. Using race, milieu, and moment as the criteria for evaluation, he claimed that art was the definitive representation of the age in which it was produced— the expression of *Zeitgeist*— exhibiting the values and ideals of the particular epoch in question.¹²³ As products of the physical and social environment, works of art had to be evaluated as the naturalist studied organic life, signifying that “the diverse aptitudes and inclinations of an individual, race, or epoch are attached, one to another, and that in this fashion the alteration of one of these observed conditions [*données observées*] in a connected individual, a compared group, in a preceding or proceeding epoch determines in them a proportional alteration of the entire system.”¹²⁴ Aesthetic considerations were not immutable, as Cousin had posited, but rather subject to the social, historical, and intellectual trends of their respective eras. “The enormous mass of general and philosophical ideas poured into minds over the last three centuries has transformed the imagination,” Taine claimed. “From this, a new ideal, a new distribution of people, another choice of subjects, attitudes, and expressions.”¹²⁵ The ideals and expectations of

¹²² Victor Cousin, *Lectures on the True, the Beautiful, and the Good*, trans. O. W. Wight (New York: D. Appleton, 1858), 157, 164.

¹²³ Thomas H. Goetz, *Taine and the Fine Arts* (Madrid: Playmor, 1973), 27-28.

¹²⁴ Hippolyte Taine, *Essais de critique et d’histoire*, 2nd Ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1866), xxvi.

¹²⁵ Taine, *Sa vie et sa correspondance*, 2:40.

an age were unique unto themselves, in Taine's view, and it was imperative that each historical epoch embody its own set of values and ideations in its art. Relying upon past molds was a negation of historical and cultural progression.

In the style of Taine's pronounced "naturalism," the art critic and novelist Emile Zola employed an organic metaphor in expressing the need for changing conceptions of art, stating that "like all things, art is a human product, a human secretion; it is our bodies which sweat the beauty of our works. Our bodies change according to the climates and according to customs [*moeurs*], and, therefore, the secretion changes equally."¹²⁶ If art were a human "secretion" which changed with environment, as Zola claimed, then any notion of the absolute or eternal in art was void. The artist Auguste Renoir, expressing his discontent over academic art's preoccupation with classical style, remarked "All those great classical compositions, those are over and done with."¹²⁷ "It is doubtless an excellent thing to study the old masters in order to learn how to paint," the poet Baudelaire contended; "but it can be no more than a waste of labor if your aim is to understand present-day beauty."¹²⁸ "There is no need to return to history," declared the art critic Jules Castagnary, "to take refuge in legends, to summon powers of imagination. Beauty is before the eyes, not in the brain; in the present, not in the past; in truth, not in dreams."¹²⁹

At mid-century, there was a growing feeling among intellectual elites and aestheticians that French art and aesthetic doctrines were becoming stagnant, possessing

¹²⁶ Emile Zola, "Mon Salon (1866)," *Le Bon combat: De Courbet aux impressionnistes*, ed. Gaëtan Picon (Paris: Hermann, 1974), 62.

¹²⁷ Jean Renoir, *Renoir* (Ottawa: Cercle du Livre de France, 1963), 97.

¹²⁸ Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1995), 13.

¹²⁹ Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Salons, 1857-1879* (Paris: Charpentier, 1892), 1:21.

“no system, no direction, and . . . abandoned to individual fantasies,” as the critic Théophile Thoré claimed.¹³⁰ The new mentality seizing intellectuals by the late 1850s imparted a conviction that science was capable of infusing intellectual life with a new ethos. The poet Leconte de Lisle proclaimed that “Art and science, separated for so long by divergent intellectual relations, must aim to link themselves close together It is now for science to infuse art with a renewed appreciation for its forgotten traditions so that it may be enabled to crystallize them in appropriate formal expressions.”¹³¹

“Literature will increasingly adopt the methods of science,” stated Gustave Flaubert. “[Writers] must present a picture, show nature as it is, but it must be a complete picture, we must paint the underside as well as the surface.”¹³² The critic Maxime Du Camp, friend of Flaubert and dedicated patron of modernity in the arts, was even more disdainful in his pronouncement: “Science is making prodigious strides; industry is accomplishing miracles, and we remain unmoved, insensitive and scornful as we strum false notes on our lyres with our eyes closed so as to see nothing or to see with obstinacy a defective past that would best be forgotten. While the steam engine has been invented, we continue to sing about Bacchus and bright red grapes. The whole thing is absurd!”¹³³

Du Camp, like many other critics of his age, recognized the incompatibility of former doctrines with the current era of progress and modernity. If the definitive *Zeitgeist* of the era was innovation and progress, why should the arts remain entombed in a past which could neither express nor depict this spirit?

¹³⁰ Quoted in Hanson, *Manet and the Modernist Tradition*, 7.

¹³¹ Quoted in Robert T. Denomé, *The French Parnassian Poets* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 32.

¹³² Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1927), 3:158.

¹³³ Grant, *French Poetry and Modern Industry*, 86.

Reacting against the Romantic conceptions of Idealism and metaphysical speculation, the Positivists urged the thorough study of the physical world with a scientific scrutiny. Only through such an evaluation, they claimed, could man begin to seek truth and objective reality. “It is not an exaggeration to say that science contains humanity’s future,” Renan had stated, “that it alone can speak the words of destiny to him and reveal the way in which to reach his end.”¹³⁴ As novelists, poets, and artists began employing such methodologies, however, the context of the Positivist spirit changed radically. The subjects of literature and art began to focus upon the quotidian and the real, refuting the established tenets of classicism. Observation and experimentation, two key components of scientific analysis, promoted a new art and literature concerned with the study of *la vie moderne*, the world that enveloped the individual on a daily basis and which was undergoing drastic change by the middle of the nineteenth century. “The time is not distant,” Baudelaire claimed, “when it will be understood that a literature which refuses to make its way in brotherly concord with science and philosophy is a murderous and suicidal literature.”¹³⁵

Garish and eccentric, Baudelaire had spent his youth living a style of life which he could scarcely afford and which his parents refused to support. His stepfather, General Jacques Aupick, was a respectable military officer under the July Monarchy and Second Empire who disapproved of his step-son’s antics and constant requests for money. Although he did not warmly support Baudelaire’s desire to write poetry, he tolerated these dreamy ambitions. In 1841, Aupick sent Baudelaire on a sea voyage, hoping that

¹³⁴ Renan, *The Future of Science*, 38.

¹³⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres*, ed. Yves-Gérard le Dantec (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pleiade, 1951), 2:424.

the trip would “return to us a poet, perhaps, but one at least whose inspiration springs from better sources than the sewers of Paris.”¹³⁶ The voyage did not, however, produce the intended results. Returning to Paris with an even greater disdain for his stepfather, Baudelaire combatted his expressed boredom by revolting against the prudish values of General Aupick. He lavished attention on prostitutes and socialized with drug abusers, visiting the soirées held by the notorious *Club des Hachichins* frequented by such writers as Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, and even Honoré de Balzac. In 1848, he participated in the political upheaval, albeit minimally, brandishing a stolen rifle and calling for friends to follow him and shoot his step-father, who was naturally fighting on the side of the government. Contumacious and determined of his creativity, Baudelaire had yet to have a work published at this point in his life and spent most of his days wandering about the streets of Paris or congregating with literary men to entertain himself.

The Baudelaire who wrote *Les Fleurs du mal*, however, was no longer the dandy and arcane poet of these former years. He had made a name for himself as the translator of Edgar Allen Poe and as an art critic and journalist. His outlandish behavior and excessive lifestyle had been subdued by financial worries and ill health. Baudelaire was now middle-aged; debts from his profligate youth demanded payment; and syphilis caused constant health problems. “You’re probably thinking my bones will decay inside a week,” he wrote to his mother. “Some people live sixty years with their blood infected. But it frightens me, if only because of the melancholy it breeds.”¹³⁷ Indigent and terminally ill, Baudelaire indeed suffered from melancholy. “Hope, defeated, weeps,” he

¹³⁶ Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire*, trans. Graham Robb (London: Hamish Hilton, 1989), 69.

¹³⁷ Pichois, *Baudelaire*, 99.

claimed in one of his poems, “and cruel, despotic anguish plants its black flag in my bowed skull.”¹³⁸ He exacerbated his condition by alcohol and chronic drug use, producing a depression from which the poet felt unable to escape. “It is too late for me to be able to make even a small fortune, above all with my disagreeable, unpopular talent.” Yet he assured his mother that “if ever I can recapture the sap and energy I have sometimes been capable of, I will vent my anger in terrifying books. I would like to raise the entire human race against me. That seems to me a pleasure which would console me for everything.”¹³⁹

While Baudelaire did not raise all of humanity against him, his *Fleurs du mal* was successful in outraging the sclerotic imperial censors. Described by the poet as a work of “cold and sinister beauty,” *Fleurs du mal* was a book of cathartic lyricism and acute personal observation.¹⁴⁰ The poetic images of urban decay, putrid corpses, and moral debauchery stabbed directly at the heart of bourgeois sensibilities and artistic taste. Baudelaire had always been fond of shocking those around him, whether by dyeing his hair green or crying out that he detected the distinct taste of a child’s brain in his food while dining in a respectable restaurant. Yet the grotesque nature of *Fleurs du mal* ran deeper than mere histrionics. Baudelaire had always placed artistic expression above moral consideration, reacting against the bourgeois notion that art was meant to be ennobling and utilitarian. Far from being the paradigm of probity and virtue, the bourgeoisie were, in Baudelaire’s opinion, hypocritical, indulging in squalid and immoral practices in the privacy of their own homes yet presenting a decorous façade in public.

¹³⁸ Charles Baudelaire, “Spleen,” *Selected Poems*, 78.

¹³⁹ Arthur Symons, ed., *The Letters of Baudelaire* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927), 236.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

“All the bourgeois fools who incessantly utter the words, ‘immoral, immorality, morality in art,’ and other silly things, remind me of Louise Villedieu, a five-franc whore who, when accompanying me one day to the Louvre— where she had never been— started blushing and covering her face; and pulling all the time at my sleeve, she asked, before the immortal statues and paintings, how people could put such obscenities on public display.”¹⁴¹

In his depictions of modern Parisian life with all its prodigality and license, Baudelaire laid bare the self-contradictions and abandon he believed bourgeois existence exemplified. The use of realistic subject matter in his art asserted the predominance of modernity [*modernité*] and the need to scrutinize the multitude of surrounding life. The artist was, he contended, “the painter of the passing moment and of all suggestions of eternity that it contains,” a spectator “who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.”¹⁴² To express the contingencies and complexities of modern life, Baudelaire believed Classical conceptions should be abandoned and replaced by new methods of expression. Academic art’s reliance upon the past for its models rendered it “false, ambiguous and obscure.” It failed to represent the “external life” of the age in which it was produced. “Woe to him who studies the antique for anything else but pure art, logic and general method!” Baudelaire warned. “By steeping himself too thoroughly in it, he will lose all memory of the present; he will renounce the rights and privileges offered by circumstance for almost all our originality comes from the seal which Time imprints on our sensations.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Charles Baudelaire, “Ma cœur mis à nu,” *Œuvres complètes*, ed., Charles Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 1:707.

¹⁴² Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” 5, 9.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14.

Baudelaire's poetry had expressed as much, capturing the rhythms and peculiarities of bourgeois Parisian life during the Second Empire. "Paris changes!" he declared, "But nothing in my melancholy has moved! New places, scaffolding, blocks, old, settled districts, everything for me becomes an allegory, and my dear memories are heavier than boulders."¹⁴⁴ The poet's milieu was populated with criminals, prostitutes, workmen, and merchants, all scuttling through the "bowels of the city of mud" on their routines and ventures.¹⁴⁵ "I already hear the deadly, echoing thud of logs on the paving-stones of courtyards," he remarked, anticipating the isolation of the oncoming winter as firewood was delivered to nearby apartment residents.¹⁴⁶ Personal reflection and observation became an expressive language for Baudelaire as he perambulated along the streets at night to avoid creditors or immersed himself in the "stony labyrinths of the metropolis" and the "bright bursts of city light."¹⁴⁷ At all times he played the *flâneur*, a bourgeois observer who extracted his art from the multifarious array of sights and sounds around him: "In the sinuous folds of old capital cities, where everything, even horror, turns to magic, I am constantly on the watch, driven by my ineluctable whims, for certain singular beings, decrepit and delightful."¹⁴⁸

Although fame and prosperity eluded him throughout his life, Baudelaire's aesthetic considerations and depictions of *la vie moderne* were the most important contribution to the modernist movement during the 1850s and early 1860s.

¹⁴⁴ Baudelaire, "Le Cygne," *Selected Poems*, 87.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., "Le Crépuscule du Soir," 100.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., "Chant d'Automne," 64.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Baudelaire, "Evening Twilight," *Paris Spleen*, trans., Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1970), 45.

¹⁴⁸ Baudelaire, "Les Petites Vieilles," *Selected Poems*, 92.

“The majority of the writers who have concerned themselves with truly modern subjects have contented themselves with the certified, official subjects, with our victories and our political heroism,” he claimed, adding, “and yet there are subjects from private life which are heroic in quite another way. The spectacle of elegant life and of the thousands of irregular existences led in basements of the big city by criminals and kept women— the *Gazette des Tribunaux* and the *Moniteur* demonstrate that we need only open our eyes to recognize our heroism.”¹⁴⁹ This drama of modern existence was found in the streets and the stories which popular newspapers printed, in the ordinary details of everyday life; it was found in the interesting mix of public and private life that the bourgeoisie exhibited. “The novel of today,” recorded the Goncourt brothers in their journal, “is written with the help of documents narrated or taken from nature, just as history is written out of documents preserved in archives. Historians tell the story of the past; novelists tell the story of the present.”¹⁵⁰ Jules Castagnary, summing up the mood of the new movement, claimed “real life contains all poetries; it is only a question of extracting them.”¹⁵¹

Extracting art from modern life meant studying and scrutinizing it with a certain scientific accuracy. The extent of science’s influence upon modernists was, however, downplayed in the name of creativity and individualism. “One has to have something to say,” claimed the artist Edouard Manet, “otherwise good night It is not enough to know one’s *métier*; one also has to be moved. Science is all very fine, but for us the

¹⁴⁹ Baudelaire, *Œuvres*, 2:134.

¹⁵⁰ Lewis Galantière, ed., *The Goncourt Journals, 1851-1870* (New York: Doubleday, 1937), 190.

¹⁵¹ Castagnary, *Salons*, 1:288.

imagination is worth more.”¹⁵² Emile Zola, one of Manet’s most strident supporters, admitted that he felt a certain affinity with the spirit of Positivism and the sciences, which accorded with his own defense of “the free manifestations of man” and the search for truth. Yet Zola could not “embrace the thousands of restrictions within science,” feeling them too doctrinal and rigid for true artistic expression.¹⁵³ Scientific principles were seen as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. “The material description of things and places in the novel, as we conceive it, is not description for the sake of description,” claimed the Goncourt Brothers. “It is a means whereby the reader is transported into a certain atmosphere favorable to the moral emotion which should arise from these things and places.”¹⁵⁴ It was a method, a way of gathering data through which modern life could be analyzed and properly expressed.

“Science is in the wind” wrote Emile Zola in 1866; “we are pushing forward, despite ourselves, under the exact study of facts and things. All the strong individualities which arise affirm themselves in the sense of truth. The movement of the age is certainly Realist, or rather Positivist.”¹⁵⁵ By the 1860s, conceptions of progress, change, and the attributes of scientific knowledge had crystallized in the mind of many prominent intellectuals and cultural elites the existence of a new mentality within France. Science became an expression of modernity, a way of living and thinking which differed markedly from that of a previous generation of Frenchmen. As the art critic Théophile Thoré claimed in 1857, “There is now in France, and everywhere, a singular inquietude,

¹⁵² Beth Archer Brombert, *Edouard Manet: Rebel in a Frock Coat* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 62.

¹⁵³ Zola, “Mon Salon (1866),” 75.

¹⁵⁴ Galantière, *The Goncourt Journals*, 202.

¹⁵⁵ Zola, “Mon Salon (1866),” 65.

an irrepressible aspiration toward a life essentially different from the life of the past.”¹⁵⁶

Intellectuals excited over the prospects which science promised adopted the methodologies of scientific analysis— observation, objectivity, and experimentation— in the hope of discovering the true, the real, and the modern. Such a tactic offered “the explanation of man to himself,” according to Renan, “the giving to him in the name of the sole legitimate authority which is the whole of human nature itself, of the creed which religion gave him ready made and which he can no longer accept.”¹⁵⁷

In the cloistered halls of academia, the prominent salons of urban elites, and the boulevard cafés of Paris the spokesmen of a new generation had emerged. They possessed an argot and vision distinct from their predecessors, drawing on a set of concepts and ideals symbolic of the new social and cultural world coming into existence in France. Affirming the primacy of science and progress in their collective outlook, elites defined a conception of modernity consistent with the symbols, values, and sensibilities of their social class, a world-view intelligible to the urban middle class, whether savant or industrialist. For them, modernity presaged a world liberated from past modes of thought and sentiment, confident of its beliefs and principles under the authority of science, and advancing toward a higher stage of intellectual and material progress. Such a progressive transformation would exemplify the “unrolling of universal necessity” prophesized by Taine.¹⁵⁸

Yet the new sense of enthusiasm and certainty manifest in French intellectual circles belied an underlying theoretical dissonance. In spite of its uniform belief in the

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Hanson, *Manet and the Modernist Tradition*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ Ernest Renan, *The Future of Science*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 40.

need to employ scientific principles in rational investigation, the new mentality possessed an inherent dualism. Although intellectual elites during the Second Empire professed the attainment of truth through the study of the material world, there remained a divide between metaphysical and positive schools of thought. Taine's belief in a scientific metaphysics posited that man was capable of discovering all universal laws through analysis and abstraction. Convinced that the absolute now lay open to man through the study of the physical world, many savants adopted a quasi—if not outright—materialism hostile to all conceptions of dogma and theological doctrine. “For Taine,” claimed Juliette Adam in her assessment of the philosopher, “it is necessary that the Catholic Church disappear completely.”¹⁵⁹ In a world in which “nature” was the bearer of truth and man the sum of all knowledge, there existed no need for the mystical and scared. Scientific investigation alone permitted human intellect to reach a “supreme summit . . . higher than the luminous and inaccessible ether,” according to Taine, at which point “the immensity of the universe” unfolded before it.¹⁶⁰

For others, like the philosopher and future politician Jules Simon, such a conception of the world was the product of a “cold heart” and “sterile intellect.” “[Such] insults, sarcasms, [and] betrayal are incomprehensible when placed in the service of a sterile reason and an intolerant liberty,” Simon cried. “What! You believe nothing and you are not humble?”¹⁶¹ The absence of spiritual principles and the certainty that primary cause could be verified through scientific investigation confirmed under the Tainean model served to draw a variety of criticisms from intellectual circles. Most strikingly,

¹⁵⁹ Adam, *Mes sentiments et nos idées*, 47.

¹⁶⁰ Taine, *Les philosophes classiques*, 6th Ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1888), 370.

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Bertocci, *Jules Simon*, 102.

Comte and other Positivists affirmed that causality was beyond the realm of human understanding and could not be validated through direct sensory experience. As Emile Littré claimed, “positive philosophy is experimental; for it emanates from the sciences, which have no guide other than experience supported by induction and deduction.”¹⁶² Contrary to the conclusions drawn from metaphysical constructs, absolute knowledge was impossible according to the Positivists; man could only proceed from verifiable data.

Thus, while a new and definitive sense of modernity had crystallized in the thinking and outlooks of intellectuals during the Second Empire, there remained an ambiguity concerning its exact theoretical precepts. Did the application of scientific methods signify that man could now probe the depths of an absolute knowledge made readily available to him through material truths? Or did it furnish the human intellect with a set of guiding principles which affirmed epistemological certainty, a new knowledge based solely upon scientifically verified data and which transcended metaphysical speculation? By 1870, no feeling of consensus was evident within intellectual circles.

What was evident by mid-century, however, was that life and intellectual outlooks were changing in France, filling some with feelings of optimism and confidence; modernity, despite theoretical conflicts, was quickly becoming a living idea in the French imagination. Yet doubts persisted over whether or not the Second Empire could be the inaugurator of such an era. The development of science and modern society required progressive institutions and a guarantee of intellectual freedom, aspects which became problematic due to the authoritarian nature of the imperial regime and its close ties to the Catholic Church. The conflict between ideals and political realities, therefore, quickly

¹⁶² Emile Littré, *De la Philosophie Positive* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique de Ladrange, 1845), 9-10.

became apparent. If Napoleon III's regime could not provide the conditions under which to initiate the envisaged society of the future, then others were willing to become its sponsors, and no group was more adamant in doing so than the Republicans. Science and modernity, fraught with expectation and variance, were beckoning republicanism from its near decade-long slumber.

Chapter Two

The Unsentimental Education

On the Champs de Mars a splendid glass pavilion was erected in the spring of 1867, signaling the commencement of the *Exposition Universelle*. Thus began the Second Empire's great "season," according to Emile Zola, "that supreme gala season which was to turn Paris into the hostelry of the entire world."¹⁶³ The capital played host to glorious displays of science and progress in the exhibition halls as an audience from around the globe arrived to marvel at the wonders of the modern world, the products of ingenuity and advancement. Busts of the emperor adorned architectural designs while his face was minted on the gold medals presented to the winners at the exposition. The Second Empire, these symbolic gestures proclaimed, stood for progress, industry, science, and prosperity.¹⁶⁴ Addressing a crowd, Emperor Napoleon III attributed the greatness and ingenuity of France to his beneficent regime. "Convinced, as I am," he declared, "that Providence blesses the efforts of all those who wish to do well, as we do, I believe in the definitive triumph of the great principles of morality and justice, which, satisfying all

¹⁶³ Emile Zola, *Money*, trans. Ernest A. Vizetelly (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1991), 237.

¹⁶⁴ Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics*, 120.

legitimate aspirations, are able alone to consolidate thrones, lift up the people, and ennoble humanity.”¹⁶⁵

Napoleon III’s image as patron of the sciences could not, however, be substantiated by the educational policies of his government, which by 1867 were challenged by the outbreak of student demonstrations, the criticism of educators, and the despair of reformers. Both a growing interest in the application of science to industry and the intellectual outlook of the positivist spirit, which stressed an overarching belief in science and progress, encouraged the reform movement embracing both politics and education under the Second Empire, one that became closely tied to Republican ideology during the 1860s. “To spread education is to develop liberty,” commented the conservative Republican Jules Simon, “in the same way as to obstruct the progress of science or necessary forms of progress such as elementary education . . . is to attack freedom at its very source.”¹⁶⁶

Inspired by the modern, scientific mentality growing up under the Second Empire, politicians and reformers saw the need for necessary improvements in education, especially those centered on developing the sciences. Yet in order to attain such changes, freedom in education needed to be assured, placing them at odds with conservative government officials and clerical spokesmen who believed a lack of restraint on national education encouraged the spread of pernicious ideas in society. Writing in 1865, the journalist Victor Meunier expressed his sympathy for the men of science, whose desire to study the physical world was already impeded by the natural obstacles standing in their

¹⁶⁵ Thomas W. Evans, *The Second French Empire*, ed. Edward A. Crane (New York: D. Appleton, 1905), 156.

¹⁶⁶ Jules Simon, *La Liberté* (Paris: Hachette, 1859), 1:13.

way. “Yet who can doubt,” he continued, “that the greater obstacles coming to them are from men and institutions; that there is in the scientific world like elsewhere, more than elsewhere, men suffering and oppressed, and that abuses remain numerous, inveterate, and flagrant?”¹⁶⁷ Meunier directed his criticism explicitly against the Second Empire, which had suppressed the spread of modern scientific ideas in lecture halls, dismissed instructors who endorsed new German philosophies, and chastised intellectuals propagating beliefs counter to religious doctrine.

The severe measures taken by the government incited not only the grievances of moderate reformers. As well, students and radicals took up confrontational roles in response to governmental intransigence. Coming to power with the ambition of unifying a divided France, Louis Napoleon promised an era of stability, prosperity, and progress while erasing the social and political cleavages of the nation’s troubled past. The dangerous ideas which precipitated revolution in 1848 had to be purged, and the educational system became the primary target. In conjunction with the Catholic Church, the Second Empire sought to place education within the parameters of state prerogative, fostering a policy of ideological purification in state-run institutions. Although committed to encouraging progress, Napoleon III found it difficult to bring forth his vision of a modern, progressive state while attempting to maintain social order and pandering to the reactionary clergy. As the government increasingly imposed a heavy hand in state universities, students responded with protests and agitation to defend academic and intellectual liberties. Far from promoting unity and social order, imperial policies

¹⁶⁷ Victor Meunier, *La Science et les savants en 1864* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1865), vii.

oftentimes accentuated the national division which Napoleon III hoped to expunge as student activism grew during the 1860s.

The controversial circumstances regarding science in state education and the Catholic-led crusade against it provided radicals and students with fodder for their assault on the government. Championing the virtues of science and its incorporation into modern education became a popular mode of protest, attacking both the imperial regime and its Catholic alliance. As a result, the scientific mentality, which began as an intellectual movement, became integrated into ideological conceptions as political opponents and students openly expressed their opposition to the empire. More specifically, the battleground forming around the question of education animated the revival of radical republicanism, as was most evident in the propaganda of student activists involved with the Blanquists. In the contentious atmosphere of the 1860s, students made common cause with political antagonists of the regime, ultimately producing the roots of a powerful opposition movement which shook the stability of the Second Empire and jeopardized Napoleon III's hope of erasing the divisions of the past.

This heightened sense of tension did not go unnoticed by officials concerned with the empire's waning popularity. As a state prosecutor in Aix warned, "however precious the support of the masses might be . . . the educated classes are nevertheless the lever by which one acts."¹⁶⁸ Napoleon III, always sensitive to public opinion, nonetheless believed it imprudent to estrange conservative support for his government at a time of welling social unrest and continued to uphold his obstinate stance on education. The empire's aversion to modern ideas taking shape in academia illustrated a fundamental flaw of the

¹⁶⁸ Roger Price, *The French Second Empire*, 127.

regime. Inhibited by its conservative political alliances and fear of social turmoil, the Second Empire became a symbol of French obduracy and parochialism rather than the progress it claimed to embody. While the government continually made promises to reform institutions and address persistent grievances, it rarely fulfilled them to the satisfaction of reformers or activists.

The disillusionment of reformers and the militancy of activists revealed not only the severity of discontent among intellectual circles by the 1860s but also the failure of the imperial regime to implement its conception of a modern political state. With all opposition crushed by violence in 1851, the consolidation of power entailed an administrative organization to serve the maintenance of order. Conceived of as a prophylactic constraint against unruly social forces, the Second Empire employed a heavy-handed bureaucracy and strong central authority to counter the ever-present revolutionary threat which appeared to loom over France. “The empire requires a strong state,” Napoleon III claimed, “capable of overcoming the obstacles that might impede its advance, for, let us not forget, the progress of every new regime is a long struggle.”¹⁶⁹ A strong and well-organized state was the panacea to heal the wounds incurred through a half-century of political instability, serving as a bulwark against revolution and anarchy. The inveterate Bonapartist Jules Gilbert Victor Fialin, the Duc de Persigny, distinguished more by his loyalty to the emperor than his actual abilities in government, summed up the imperial state’s role as the guarantor of order, claiming “we have an administrative

¹⁶⁹ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 38.

hierarchy . . . outside of which there is nothing but grains of sand without cohesion or common purpose.”¹⁷⁰

The architects of the Second Empire intended to close the great political rift which the Revolution of 1789 had opened in France, hoping to rally the nation to a moderate government with nationalist aims. Its principles would be maintained, with extreme political factions—namely Jacobinism and Legitimism—eliminated. “The Napoleonist idea means to reconstitute French society, overthrown by fifty years of revolution,” wrote Louis Napoleon in 1840, “to conciliate order and liberty, the rights of the people, and the principles of law As it builds on a solid foundation, it rests its system on the principles of eternal justice, and treads under-foot the reactionary theories brought about by party excesses.”¹⁷¹ Universal suffrage, decreed in 1848 with the overthrow of the Orléanist monarchy, was preserved, giving the semblance of a truly democratic era. Industry and trade were encouraged, drawing the bourgeoisie and business communities closer to the government while combating the severe economic conditions which stimulated the appeal of radical socialism. Anticlericalism, a bone of contention within France since the Revolution, would be suppressed and eradicated, providing the basis for the envisaged national harmony for which the empire stood.¹⁷² The twin pillars of industry and order became the driving ethos of the imperial regime, bringing into existence a progressive political state with a strong, centralized bureaucracy

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Delarosa, ed., *Le Duc de Persigny et les doctrines de l'Empire* (Paris: Plon, 1865), 163.

¹⁷¹ Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, “L’Idée Napoléonienne,” in *The Political and Historical Works of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1972), 2: 269.

¹⁷² René Rémond, *Les droites en France* (Paris: Aubier, 1982), 106-07; Joseph N. Moody, *Church and Society: Catholic Social and Political Thought and Movements, 1789-1950* (New York: Arts, 1953), 135-36.

capable of forcing unity upon a nation acutely “*coupé en deux*,” as the political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville once remarked.

Despite the allusions to 1789 and the empire’s proclaimed dedication to liberty and order, the central paradox of the French Revolution persisted: could political liberty exist in conjunction with a strong and highly centralized state? Although dedicated to creating progressive institutions, many Bonapartists remained unable to eschew their continual suspicions of the anarchic nature of popular sovereignty. The national legislature, the Corps législatif, served as a mere rubber-stamp parliament while universal suffrage was exploited and manipulated through crafty political maneuvers. Nineteenth-century Europe was by no means a great era for democracy, and more tyrannical regimes certainly existed in the east where conservative rulers presided over absolutist and autocratic states. In comparison, the Second Empire appeared moderate and forward-looking; its violations against free speech and assembly were paltry in comparison to the ruthless tactics practiced by the Russian tsars or Habsburg emperors. Yet in France, the birthplace of the great Revolution which had set out to free Europe from the manacles of absolutism, there endured a desire for true democracy and a fulfillment of the principles of 1789—a goal which had appeared attainable in the first optimistic days of the 1848 revolution. But the Second Republic had fallen far short of its aims, and the Second Empire, held back by its reservations of popular government and fears of revolutionary politics, proved unwilling to satisfy such expectations. In the eyes of the Bonapartists, the authority of the state remained the linchpin of power and stability.

In accordance with the tightening of central control on the state apparatus following the creation of the empire, the education system served as a crucial weapon in

consolidating political power. During 1848, the universities of Paris had become a crucible for progressive and revolutionary ideas. “Youth understand only too well the duties that the future imposes upon it,” proclaimed a student publication in 1848, “to raise a flag other than that of its immortal forebear; . . . for the time of liberty approaches, and woe to those who try to crush it.”¹⁷³ Marching to the Palais-Bourbon and the Champs Elysées on the eve of the July Monarchy’s overthrow, students sang patriotic songs like *La Marseillaise* and the *Girondin Chorus* in unison to show their opposition to the king. The days leading up to revolution that February revealed the threat to stability that the universities could pose, and conservatives were quick to agree that suitable restraints had to be placed on the educational establishment to combat the rise of dangerous ideas.

The role of education and its place within the state was a wound opened during the Revolution of 1789 that had never properly healed. Under the Ancien Régime, Catholic officials had served as the moral educators of society, administering schools that were attended by a select few of the aristocratic elite. During the Revolution, the radical Directory championed the notion of *liberté de l’enseignement*, which effectively removed religious influence over education and gave academic freedom to teachers. Clerics, possessing only disdain for these radical reforms, continually clamored to reestablish their control over schools. From the First Empire through the July Monarchy, the struggle between lay and clerical control over education remained a contentious issue as the

¹⁷³ John G. Gallaher, *The Students of Paris and the Revolution of 1848* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 20.

clergy battled against the government, usually finding itself on the losing side of the debate.¹⁷⁴

Yet 1848 imbued the Church with a new crusading spirit, one sanctioned by the Papacy itself. The salute of cannon fire which signaled the beginning of Pope Pius IX's reign in the summer of 1846 matched the exuberant optimism in Rome over the cardinals' selection. Warmly referred to as Pio Nono, Pius IX's papal agenda was clear as the new pope arrived at St. Paul's Basilica. Amidst the pomp and cheer, Pio Nono made known his desire to reconcile the Catholic Church with liberalism and modernity. Granting a constitution and pressing his desire to reform the papal bureaucracy, he was hailed the "liberal pope." "The events in Rome are such to delight us all," wrote the Piedmontese official Massimo d'Azeglio, "the appearance of a Pope who has entered the realm of moderate liberalism is a fact of new and immense importance."¹⁷⁵ The optimism was, however, quashed in 1848 when Italian nationalists, inspired by the various European revolutions throughout the continent, challenged the temporal powers of the pope and declared a secular Roman republic under the leadership of the radical Giuseppe Garibaldi. Forced into exile, Pio Nono now recognized the implicit dangers of encouraging reform. The extreme nationalism and anticlericalism of the republic was a sobering slap in the face, one not to be forgotten when he was restored to power.

Searching about for a political ally in exile, Pius discovered that the Austrian Habsburgs, their hands tied with the various revolutions erupting throughout the empire,

¹⁷⁴ Sandra Hovarth-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education: Liberal Reform in the Second Empire* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 28-34; Anderson, *Education in France*, 15-19.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Frank J. Coppa, *Pope Pius IX: Crusader In A Secular Age* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), 47.

could offer no assistance at the moment. Turning to the west, he found an unexpected friend in Louis Napoleon. Looking to strengthen his Catholic support at home and wary of a strong Austrian presence in central Italy, Louis offered military assistance in crushing the Roman republic, a dangerous precedent for the new French republic also born from 1848. Returning to Rome in 1850 beside French troops, the once liberal Pio Nono unleashed an acerbic diatribe against those who had forced his retreat, reclaiming his throne through the “sovereign Providence of God.” Embittered and disillusioned with the prospects of reconciling the Papacy with modernity, the Roman Pontiff reasserted his role as the supreme spiritual leader of the Catholic Church and stressed the Church’s need to combat the degenerative and pernicious forces of liberalism and modernity throughout Europe.¹⁷⁶ The ephemeral hope of rendering the Catholic Church a progressive force within European society was shattered as reaction and counterrevolution prevailed.

Taking its cue from Rome, the French clergy blamed the violence and disorder of the June Days on the absence of religious instruction in lay education. “All the disasters of 1848 came from contempt for religious authority,” seethed the Abbé Gouget, who accused the bourgeoisie of “accepting an education that cares nothing for God, as long as it respects the family and property.”¹⁷⁷ Similarly, the Abbé Gaume denounced “pagan learning,” which he claimed served as the source of socialism and crime in France.¹⁷⁸ In the aftermath of revolution, the Church felt the moment opportune to restore its control over education by exploiting the anxiety generated by the red specter of socialism. The presumed danger residing in state-run institutions had to be checked by fervent religious

¹⁷⁶ Moody, *Church and Society*, 37-38; Coppa, *Pope Pius IX*, 97-116.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Anderson, *Education in France*, 114.

¹⁷⁸ Patrick J. Harrigan, *Mobility, Elites, and Education in French Society of the Second Empire* (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980), 131.

instruction. Ironically, clerics came to support the revolutionary notion of *liberté de l'enseignement* because it would allow Catholic schools to compete with state institutions.

Louis Napoleon was not unreceptive to Catholic demands. Courting conservative support for his election to the presidency in 1848, Louis realized that his electoral platform of social order could be joined with Catholic pleas for freedom of education. That year, he met with Charles-Forbes-René de Montalembert, leader of the liberal Parti Catholique. During the 1840s, Montalembert had pressed for religious control over education, believing it could restore the influence of the Church within society. As a prominent opinion leader with significant political influence in the Catholic community, Montalembert could deliver decisive electoral support for the presidential candidate. Assessing the political value of Catholic support, Louis promised Montalembert that he would support the freedom to teach if elected to the presidency, thereby breaking the state monopoly over education. The stratagem worked as planned, with Catholic leaders throwing their support behind Louis Napoleon during the election and effectively sealing an alliance with the state against the pernicious force of socialism.¹⁷⁹

The following year, Napoleon made good on his promise when he ordered his minister of education, Count Alfred de Falloux, to assemble a commission and draw up new legislation. The commission was a mélange of Catholics and former Orléanists, including Montalembert, Adolphe Thiers, and Félix Dupanloup. An astute journalist and politician, Thiers had served as minister of the interior under Louis Philippe. While his term of service had been brief, he incurred the permanent ire of the French working class

¹⁷⁹ Joseph Moody, "The French Catholic Press in the Education Conflict of the 1840's" *French Historical Studies*, 8 (1972): 394-415; Williams, *Gaslight and Shadows*, 75.

after ordering troops to crush a Lyonese workers' uprising in 1834 with brute force. An elitist who possessed a hatred for the bourgeoisie and poor alike, his gnome-like, bespectacled face had become the *bête noire* of the radical left.¹⁸⁰ Matching Thiers's patronizing mien was Dupanloup, the Bishop of Orléans. As a cleric who had reconciled the great apostate of the French Revolution, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, to the Church on his deathbed, the bishop stood as one of the most ardent supporters of religious instruction during the July Monarchy. Believing that France's grandeur was tied up with its Catholic heritage, Dupanloup adamantly proclaimed the Church's obligation to educate— both morally and intellectually— the children of the elite who would one day serve the state. Education, according to the bishop, was “a constant and terrible struggle against all the evil instincts and all the evil forces of depraved human nature,” whether those evils be the unruly forces of socialism or religious skepticism.¹⁸¹

The mix of conservative sentiment and religious fervor making up the commission left no doubt as to the tenor of its debates. At the sessions, religion was called upon to sanitize educational institutions and save society from the anarchic sway of socialism. The carnage of 1848, the commission argued, derived from the dissemination of radical ideas through lay education. “I demand that the parish priest's position is strengthened,” declared Thiers, “made much stronger than it is, because I count on him to propagate that good philosophy which teaches that man is here to suffer and not that other philosophy which, on the contrary, tells man: enjoy yourself . . . you are here below to take up your little share of happiness, and if you do not find it in your

¹⁸⁰ J. P. T. Bury, *Thiers 1797-1877: A Political Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 51-53.

¹⁸¹ Félix Dupanloup, *De l'éducation*, (Paris: C. Douniol, 1862), 1:238, 2:602, 368.

present situation, strike without fear the rich whose egotism prevents you from enjoying your share of happiness.”¹⁸² The scope of primary and secondary education was, moreover, to be severely limited. “Reading, writing, and reckoning,” Thiers advised, “that is all that should be taught; as for the rest, it is superfluous.”¹⁸³ The *loi Falloux*, as the legislation became known, was passed in March 1850. Under its guidelines, Catholic schools were given a virtual *carte blanche* while state schools became subject to rigorous inspection. In addition, religious officials were selected as overseers of the *baccalauréate* examination, with the state reserving the right to inspect all schools in order to guarantee conformity of instruction.¹⁸⁴

Although the empire was a secular regime in principle, it was not above drawing the Church closer to the state for opportunistic reasons. The *loi Falloux* marked the beginning of the “Party of Order,” an alliance designed by Louis Napoleon between the bourgeoisie and prominent Catholic spokesmen that would extend long into the Second Empire. Aside from forging a coalition against radical socialism, a strong link between church and state held the prospect of drawing Legitimists, the provincial nobility which continued to harbor a maudlin attachment to both the royal Bourbon dynasty and the Catholic Church, closer to the Bonapartist cause. The government also expected clerics to support imperial policies in return for their privileged status, an expectation that became problematic in later years.¹⁸⁵ The alignment worked to Louis’ benefit directly after the coup in December 1851, when the clergy mobilized support for his illegal seizure of

¹⁸² Quoted in Price, *The French Second Empire*, 194.

¹⁸³ Anderson, *Education in France*, 48.

¹⁸⁴ Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France*, 30; Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education*, 37-38.

¹⁸⁵ Moody, *Church and Society*, 139; Price, *The French Second Empire*, 198, 272-76.

power. The ultramontane Louis Veuillot, writing on 5 December, strongly advised his readers to support the new government, reminding them that it stood for the cause of “social order.” “To vote against Louis Napoleon would justify socialist revolution,” warned Montelambert, adding that voters now had a choice between Bonapartism and the “total ruin of France.”¹⁸⁶

Despite the imposition of the conservative *loi Falloux* and virulent Catholic criticism of lay education, the French *Université* retained a fair amount of autonomy after 1850. While the state appointed a Grand Master to oversee higher education, he was beholden to the *Conseil de l'Instruction Publique*, an elected body of *universitaires* from the academic community. State policies affecting the universities were drawn up in conjunction with the *Conseil*, allowing for a measure of consensus between government officials and the academic profession. The fact that the *loi Falloux* did not stipulate controls on French universities forced clerics wishing to direct the policies of higher education to rely on their alliance with the state and apply pressure on governmental decision-making. Regardless of clerical influence, the government itself was wary of the freedoms possessed by the *Université* and targeted them after 1852 as the imperial bureaucracy clamped down on state institutions.

Carrying out this task fell to Hippolyte Fortoul, Napoleon III's minister of public instruction. A former art critic and Saint-Simonian, Fortoul was a moderate Republican who, through sycophantic overtures during the Second Republic, had curried favor with the emperor. Deeming moral education just as important as intellectual instruction, he immediately set out to undermine the autonomy of the universities. Fortoul stacked the

¹⁸⁶ Jean Maurian, *La Politique ecclésiastique du Second Empire, 1852-1869* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1930), 5-6.

Conseil with his own men by ordering the body to give a third of its seats to ecclesiastics and notables responsible to the ministry. In addition, the minister of public instruction possessed the power to design academic curricula and to appoint or dismiss professors at will. According to Fortoul, pedagogical lectures were to be “dogmatic and purely educational.”¹⁸⁷ Order could only be established, he believed, “by the most vigorous unity of direction.” His reorganization of the *Université* would allow higher education to be “directed by a single hand” and compliant to the state.¹⁸⁸

The benefits of centralization were sparse. Government control over the budget represented a major grievance for instructors and administrators concerned with lack of funding and inadequate facilities. The Second Empire channeled only a modicum of funds into education, and the effect did not go unnoticed by the *universitaires*. Victor Duruy, repeatedly frustrated by the issue of the budget, expressed his discontent to the emperor personally, complaining, “France spends twenty-five million for a prefecture, fifty or sixty million for an opera, and can manage only seven to eight million for the primary education of her people.”¹⁸⁹ In 1868, Louis Pasteur, former director of science at the *École Normale Supérieure*, published *Le budget de la science*, complaining about the deficiencies of laboratories and the paucity of resources available to carry out serious scientific research. “Nowhere was science organized,” claimed Ernest Lavisse, friend and colleague of Duruy, “there was no means of information.”¹⁹⁰ While Fortoul had trumpeted the Second Empire’s dedication to modernizing French education as early as

¹⁸⁷ Robert Fox, “Science, the University, and the State in Nineteenth-Century France,” in Gerald L. Geison, ed., *Professions and the French State, 1700-1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 87.

¹⁸⁸ Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France*, 34.

¹⁸⁹ Victor Duruy, *Notes et souvenirs* (Paris: Hachette, 1901), 1:214.

¹⁹⁰ Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education*, 174.

1852, stating that “the new University will tie its life to that of modern societies through a fuller organization of the teaching of science, source of the wealth and political supremacy of nations,” such promises had yet to bear fruit a decade later.¹⁹¹

Instructors themselves felt the strain of centralization. *Universitaires* and educated individuals in line with the tenets and policies of the imperial regime were awarded official patronage, customarily leading to prestigious posts in Paris or monetary prizes. Those opposed to the strictures of the empire found it difficult, however, to advance their careers or even attain a suitable position. Through the empire’s consolidation of power, instructors also discovered that their social function was altered. Instead of professionals imparting knowledge to students, Fortoul’s reforms relegated teachers to *fonctionnaires* of the state apparatus, bureaucratic servants aiding the regime’s quest to secure order.¹⁹² “The proper mission of universities is to teach the most undisputed parts of human knowledge,” stated an official circular, “it is not to encourage the inventive spirit, nor to propagate discoveries that are not fully verified.”¹⁹³ *Universitaires* hoping to professionalize their disciplines and foster intellectual advancements in their respective fields through laboratory work and research found the ministry of public education a constant obstacle. The constraints placed on education impelled instructors to give insipid lectures to an apathetic audience. The effect, as Renan commented, lowered educated men “to the ranks of public entertainer.”¹⁹⁴

The evident drawbacks that ensued from centralization drew sharp criticism from the academic community. When commenting publicly on the state of French education, a

¹⁹¹ Harry W. Paul, *From Knowledge to Power*, 22.

¹⁹² Fox, “Science, the University, and the State in Nineteenth-Century France,” 84-91.

¹⁹³ Quoted in Anderson, *Education in France*, 229.

¹⁹⁴ Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France*, 79.

professor at Strasbourg did not fail to point out the detriment centralization posed, insisting, “it is in administrative centralization, it is in the innumerable cogs which make up this heavy and exhausting mechanism, it is in the obstacles of every nature that oppose all life, all scientific and intellectual spontaneity, that one must search and where one will find the causes of the petrification, of the inertia of higher education in France.”¹⁹⁵

Hippolyte Taine once joked that the education minister could check his pocket watch at a given time and be certain that every lycée student throughout France was studying the exact same page of Virgil at that moment.¹⁹⁶ Aside from administrative difficulties, however, centralization also posed a problem when it came to curriculum. As men like Taine and Renan established their teaching careers, the importation of new scientific ideas into education clashed dramatically with established pedagogical subjects and the government’s hope of maintaining a rigid academic orthodoxy.

Whereas scientific scholarship was ignored by the government on fiscal and bureaucratic grounds, vehement Catholics had their own gripes. The advent of teachings contrary to religious doctrine, especially Protestant German scholarship, was anathema to the clergy and further justified their desire for control over national education. Outraged by the turn in secular education, the Jesuit Père Tissier delivered a sermon to women in 1858 in which he advised “if your husbands want your children to go to the lycée, do not obey: resistance becomes a duty.”¹⁹⁷ A petition submitted to the ministry of public instruction by Léopold Giraud, editor of the Catholic *Journal de villes et campagnes*, warned about the “propagation of dangerous doctrines” in state institutions before

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 71.

¹⁹⁶ Hippolyte Taine, *The Modern Regime* (New York: Peter Smith, 1931), 2:162.

¹⁹⁷ Harrigan, *Mobility, Elites, and Education*, 131.

alluding to a recent doctoral dissertation in the Paris faculty of medicine that rejected free will, a crucial tenet of Christian doctrine.¹⁹⁸ In 1864, Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus Errorum* gave further encouragement to clerical opposition when it condemned lay teaching and contended "it is an error to believe that the Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself to, and agree with, progress, liberalism, and contemporary civilization."¹⁹⁹

Falloux, who had put through the legislation bearing his name in 1850, pressed the need for religious influence on the masses, claiming, "We must moralize the communes and the towns, fight against revolutionary influence, and establish religious institutions in these places."²⁰⁰ Dupanloup, concerned with the growth of materialism in the universities, conferred with Pius IX in 1866 and was ordered to devote all his efforts to "the energetic defense of religion."²⁰¹

Despite the acrimony of Catholics, the imperial government was not as receptive to clerical concerns by 1860 as it once had been. The alliance maintained during the 1850s showed signs of strain as Napoleon III's foreign policy drove a wedge between the government and its Catholic support. His patronage of Italian nationalism, aimed at bringing a weak, unified Italy under French influence, presented a delicate situation when Italy demanded the annexation of Rome and the Papal States. The clergy execrated the empire for supporting the claims of Italian nationalists over the temporal powers of the Papacy, printing diatribes in the Catholic press and taking their opposition into the pulpit. In 1863, a priest addressing his local congregation in Tresboeuf compared the emperor to

¹⁹⁸ Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education*, 202; Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 356-57.

¹⁹⁹ Williams, *Gaslight and Shadows*, 21.

²⁰⁰ Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 136.

²⁰¹ Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education*, 202.

the Anti-Christ in his fulmination, adding that if the imperial government persisted “there will no longer be a Pope or any religion.”²⁰² Clerical resistance became so great that prefects were ordered to shut down pro-papal journals and arrest any clergy member caught insinuating politics into his sermons.²⁰³

The estrangement of Catholic support became even more pronounced due to political circumstances arising during the 1860s. With the opening of a new decade, the prosperity and stability which the Second Empire had ushered in was rapidly waning. An economic downturn due to trade agreements that reduced tariff protections and the revival of fierce political antagonism within the parliamentary Corps législatif indicated that the halcyon days of the 1850s were coming to an end. “In the past ten years, never has France faced such a worried situation,” the Bonapartist dignitary Horace de Viel-Castel commented in 1862. “The great party of order is disorganized, there is anxiety everywhere, and a sort of silent agitation is creeping throughout the country.”²⁰⁴

Following the coup in 1851, Napoleon III had carried out an effective purge, driving Republicans underground and confining their movement to local levels. “[The Republicans] lack cohesion,” one official reported in 1854. “The suspicion, which exists even between the most militant, prevents them from establishing a united group influenced by the same ideas.”²⁰⁵ Yet in 1857, the government was shocked by the election of five moderate Republicans to the Corps législatif. The victory of “*les cinq*”

²⁰² Price, *The French Second Empire*, 114.

²⁰³ Maurian, *La politique ecclésiastique*, 175; Lynn M. Case, *French Opinion on War and Diplomacy During the Second Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), 115-16.

²⁰⁴ Comte Horace de Viel-Castel, *Mémoires sur le règne de Napoleon III* (Paris: Le Prat, 1979), 2:192.

²⁰⁵ Price, *The French Second Empire*, 343.

signaled a revitalization of the Republican Party, and in 1863 it made further electoral gains in Paris, this time returning former *quarante-huitards* who did not hide their loathing for the imperial government. “Paris has an air of revolution and riot,” wrote an observer after the election results had been announced. “The government has been routed totally . . . [and] the republicans are confident that in the next elections France will follow Paris.”²⁰⁶

The weakening of the clerical alliance and the growth of a solid opposition party had a sobering effect on the emperor, indicating the need for a shift in the government’s political orientation. Backing this scheme was the president of the Corps législatif and Louis Napoleon’s half-brother, Charles Auguste Joseph, the Duc de Morny. An eccentric fond of meeting public officials dressed in sky-blue pajamas and showing off his private menagerie of exotic animals, Morny expressed concern over what the growing radicalism foreshadowed for the authoritarian empire. He was convinced, however, that the opposition could be propitiated through the adoption of specific liberal policies, sidestepping the more drastic alternatives of constitutional reform or governmental reorganization.²⁰⁷ As early as 1861, he had made overtures to the leader of *les cinq* in the legislature, the moderate Emile Ollivier, and revealed his intention of creating a more liberal regime based upon parliamentary support. Although both agreed that the time was not yet ripe for such a maneuver, Morny’s efforts brought about a tenuous rapprochement with liberals and moderate Republicans.²⁰⁸ The emperor was not as optimistic as his half-

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 380.

²⁰⁷ Williams, *Gaslight and Shadows*, 57.

²⁰⁸ Theodore Zeldin, *Emile Ollivier and the Liberal Empire of Napoleon III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 74-75.

brother, and preferred to offer the opposition only minimal concessions while preserving the government's authoritarian stature.

Hoping to mend fences with the alienated academic community, Napoleon III searched about for a suitable minister of public instruction, one who was progressive yet moderate. In 1863, he settled on the liberal Victor Duruy, a former teacher and academic inspector in Paris. Duruy had come to the attention of Napoleon III while the emperor was writing his history of Julius Caesar. A reputable historian, he collaborated with Napoleon III on the work by offering advice and criticism for which the emperor was thankful. During his tenure as inspector, Duruy had made known his dedication to education reform, claiming, "Man has been given powers; it is our duty to develop them."²⁰⁹ He spurned socialism and utopian strategies, believing that education alone was capable of improving man's own position in life. "Social evil is my personal enemy," he once affirmed, "and the greatness of France my religion."²¹⁰ A confirmed Deist, Duruy was not antipathetic to the applied sciences, desiring to incorporate them into higher education and create a "quiet revolution" capable of ushering in a French scientific renaissance. "[The] bishops are fundamentally attached to the Pope and his policies," Duruy wrote to the emperor, expressing his hostility toward the clerical opposition, "which are in absolute contradiction with the ideas and institutions of modern society."²¹¹ The modern society Duruy envisioned existed across the Rhine. Well aware of the

²⁰⁹ Williams, *Gaslight and Shadows*, 191.

²¹⁰ Duruy, *Notes et souvenirs*, 1:57-59, 52-53.

²¹¹ Price, *The French Second Empire*, 203.

advantage Germany had over French scholarship, he alluded to “the great development of experimental sciences which we study with anxiety.”²¹²

Duruy’s appraisal of German erudition was well founded. Universities across the Rhine prided themselves on the “modern” and scientific outlook which they cultivated, especially when it came to the growing interest in materialism. With the rejection of Hegel’s absolute idealism and the demystification of Christianity through theological rationalism, German scholars had advanced a conception of the world and consciousness predicated solely upon the inherent laws of matter. Recent scientific discoveries, such as Robert Brown’s observation of molecular motion and Hermann von Helmholtz’s breakthrough on the laws of thermodynamics, gave further credence to such an assumption. Arthur Schopenhauer grudgingly sanctioned the validity of materialism in his *World as Will and Idea*, claiming “the aim and ideal of all natural sciences is at bottom a consistent materialism.”²¹³ Scientific breakthroughs had slowly revealed that philosophy was no longer the paradigm of truth and knowledge; only the study of physical matter held the promise of such revelations. With its assertion of the scientific over the metaphysical, German ideas quickly found an enthusiastic welcome among intellectuals in France.²¹⁴

In 1855, Ludwig Büchner, a faculty member at the medical school in Tuebingen, published the definitive work on German materialism which drew wide attention throughout Europe. Entitled *Kraft und Stoff* [*Force and Matter*], Büchner’s work was

²¹² Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education*, 196.

²¹³ Will Durant, ed., *The Works of Schopenhauer* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1928), 8.

²¹⁴ Richard C. Vitzthum, *Materialism: An Affirmative History and Definition* (New York: Prometheus, 1995), 95-97.

written in a comprehensible style that permitted scholars and amateurs alike to read it. Materialism based its premise on the claim that all matter was subject to universal laws which could be understood by human knowledge.²¹⁵ Science was, therefore, closely tied to materialist conceptions, presenting an objective evaluation of the physical world. “We must finally be permitted to leave all questions about morality and utility out of sight,” Büchner wrote. “The chief, and indeed the sole object which concerned us in these researches, is truth. Nature exists neither for religion, for morality, nor for human beings; but it exists for itself.”²¹⁶ In its affirmation of the scientific spirit, *Force and Matter* focused upon a wide range of topics, including a physical theory of cosmology, a discourse on human origins explained in terms of natural processes, and an analysis of cognitive brain functions and physiology. An instant success, Büchner’s *Force and Matter* was a concise, yet detailed, account of materialism which epitomized the new outlook in German scholarship. Paul Janet, professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne, described it as “a kind of handbook of materialism,” noting “recently translated, [*Force and Matter*] seems to have also been rather popular with us.”²¹⁷

The French were, indeed, hungry for the importation of German ideas. Writing to Ernest Renan in 1852, Hippolyte Taine expressed his newfound curiosity with German scholarship, stating “[the Germans] are, in relation to our time, what the English were to France at the time of Voltaire.”²¹⁸ The Alsatians Charles Dollfus and Auguste Nefftzer, feeling that the nationalist policies of the Second Empire were leading to French

²¹⁵ Maurice Mendelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 22-23.

²¹⁶ Ludwig Buechner, *Force and Matter: Empirico-Philosophical Studies, Intelligibly Rendered* (London: Truebner, 1870), 257.

²¹⁷ Paul Janet, *The Materialism of the Present Day*, ix.

²¹⁸ Hippolyte Taine, *Sa vie et correspondance*, 1:225-26.

intellectual parochialism, founded the *Revue germanique*, a journal intended to report on German science and literature. The aim of the publication was to bring the French public in touch with intellectual trends across the Rhine, including the growing interest in German materialism.²¹⁹ As late as 1870, Félix Roubaud, editor of the academic journal *L'Opinion médicale*, criticized the government for allowing French medical training to decline in comparison to that of Germany, asking “Do we have to be silent when facing a regime which has disorganized our education and has allowed our intellect level to drop so low that foreign students forget the path that leads to France and go instead to Würzburg [*sic*], Vienna or Berlin?”²²⁰

Like many other reformers of his era inspired by trends in both France and Germany, Duruy believed that the future of modern education lay in developing the sciences. Despite the vehement reproaches of French clerics, the imperial government, in his view, was not theoretically at odds with the demands of reformers. Napoleon III possessed an amateur interest in the sciences, often inviting renowned scholars such as Claude Bernard and Louis Pasteur to talk with him at the Tuileries Palace. Pasteur had once enlightened the emperor with his knowledge of fermentation, after which Napoleon III sent for a microscope and samples of spoiled wine to see the results for himself.²²¹ Even Fortoul had given limited encouragement to the applied sciences, stressing the benefits specialized training and a basic scientific curriculum could provide for “the progress of the arts and of industry.”²²² Yet how could the government endorse such

²¹⁹ Robert Fox, “Science, the University, and the State in Nineteenth-Century France,” 95.

²²⁰ Bertrand Taithe, *Defeated Flesh: Medicine, Welfare, and Warfare in the Making of Modern France* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 49.

²²¹ Williams, *Gaslight and Shadows*, 171.

²²² Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France*, 43.

measures without estranging its Catholic supporters? Unable to devise a pragmatic solution, the emperor and his entourage of conservative ministers preferred to appease Catholic reactionism rather than sanction truly liberal reforms which could possibly endanger the government's authoritarian policies. Despite Duruy's hope of a "quiet revolution," he found his freedom of action hampered by staunch conservative opposition and the emperor's futile hope of pleasing everybody.

Upon taking up his post in the ministry at 110 rue de Grenelle, Duruy announced his intention of reversing the damage done during Fortoul's administration.²²³ No sooner was he in office, however, than a controversial situation presented itself. In 1862, Ernest Renan, recently elected to the Collège de France, gave the first lecture from his forthcoming book *The Life of Jesus*. Having traveled to the Holy Land in 1860 as part of an imperial archeological expedition, Renan wrote his study of Christ amid the landscape of Christian ruins adorning the Middle Eastern terrain. Here, at the heart of the Christian world, he traveled the same paths as the messiah, taking notes and pouring over copious Biblical texts. As a young seminary student, Renan had steeped himself in the Christian humanism of such German theologians as David Friedrich Strauss and Bruno Bauer, scholars who had stripped Christ of His divine aura and presented Him as an historical personage. Writing by the glow of sallow lantern light in his tent as the desert winds howled through the night, the Breton scholar who had continually sought faith in the throes of skepticism produced the definitive work of his theological career. For such a spiritual man as Renan, the journey was tantamount to a pilgrimage, but one of a quite

²²³ Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education*, 71.

different nature. And the imperial patrons who had accorded him this opportunity soon found themselves aghast when the work was finally published three years later.

Intent on presenting a humanistic history of Christianity that showed the genesis of the religion in practical terms, Renan went so far as to deny the divinity of Christ and to attribute the working of miracles to apocryphal accounts by His followers. “We do not say that miracle is impossible,” Renan wrote, “we say only that there has never been a satisfactorily authenticated miracle.”²²⁴ After delivering his lecture, he was suspended from the college by the education ministry. The egregious attack on the sanctity of the Christian religion was far too radical for a regime allied with the Catholic Church. In defiance, Renan continued to give private lectures at his own home, where students attended as a symbolic gesture of political resistance. To avenge his suspension, Renan published his *Life of Jesus* in June 1863. By the following year, it had gone through ten editions and sold some 50,000 copies, much to the government’s chagrin.²²⁵

The conflict soon mushroomed into a controversy as Catholic militants unleashed venomous criticisms at Renan and Duruy, and fiery arguments in lecture halls disrupted classes. Although a supporter of academic freedom, Duruy disdained instructors who presented a threat to the religious or political order that the Second Empire so desperately sought to maintain. As a reformer, he believed incendiary acts to be counterproductive to true reform, serving only to provoke the taunts and criticisms of fanatical conservatives. Moderation was needed, and Renan’s recalcitrant behavior had to be handled expeditiously. Grappling with the issue and goaded by acrimonious Catholics, Duruy

²²⁴ Quoted in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 165.

²²⁵ Mme James Darmester, *The Life of Ernest Renan* (London: Methuen & Co., 1898), 153-68; Warman, *Ernest Renan*, 80-81.

dismissed Renan from the Collège de France, giving him as paltry compensation a post at the Bibliothèque Impériale. Renan refused to relinquish his chair, however, on the grounds that he had been elected to it by his fellow colleagues. Students protesting for the right of academic freedoms supported Renan, compelling Duruy to impose his prerogative despite their disapproval.²²⁶

The Renan affair set the tone for Duruy's troubled career as minister of public instruction. Caught between conservative forces and his own hope of reforming the educational system, he became the target of both the Left and the Right, at once appearing either too conservative or too radical depending on the critic. Eugène Rouher, a leading conservative and the emperor's prime minister, accused the education minister of behaving like a "bull in a china shop." In his desire to mollify opposition, Duruy found himself reacting with a heavy hand when it came to controversial ideas arising in the universities. Accusations of incompetence levied against him during the Third Republic appear harsh in hindsight, for he did possess an honest desire to modernize French education. He was acutely aware that doing so would take time. "When it is necessary to renovate the entire organization of education in a country in which there is an old system," Duruy would later claim, "one must proceed logically, wisely, and slowly."²²⁷ With the rapid growth of new ideas during the Second Empire, however, time was not something an ambitious official had in abundance.

In 1865, academic freedom was again the subject of controversy when the Russian-born and French-educated psychologist Alexandre Axenfeld gave a lecture

²²⁶ Duruy, *Notes et souvenirs*, 1:37; Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 34; Darmester, *The Life of Ernest Renan*, 155-57.

²²⁷ Duruy, *Notes et souvenirs*, 1:324.

before the Paris medical faculty in which he denounced the witch hunts of the sixteenth-century physician Jean Wier. In his analysis, Axenfeld accused Wier of failing to recognize that those charged with practicing the black arts were mentally ill. He was consciously contrasting the enlightenment of scientific investigation with the blind fanaticism of religion, and the education ministry summarily suppressed his lectures for posing a threat to public order. Three years later, he was again the subject of official censure when Pierre-Jean Grenier defended his thesis, *Etude médico-psychologique du libre arbitre humain*, before the Paris medical faculty with Axenfeld as his academic sponsor. Grenier's thesis rejected free will, claiming that it could not be proven based upon a purely psychological analysis. This evaluation aroused the ire of Catholics, who claimed that free will was integral to the Christian faith. Duruy reacted by annulling the degree awarded to Grenier and reprimanding Axenfeld.²²⁸

Undismayed by the minister's decision, Grenier earned his degree later that year, writing upon an anodyne topic that slipped by the education ministry's watchful eye. In the introduction to his thesis, however, Grenier gave his pent up frustrations free reign. He vilified Dupanloup, the primary individual who had called for the annulment of his first degree, and execrated the strong relationship between church and state existing in France under the Second Empire. The regime of Moral Order, he continued, posed an obstacle to serious scholarship in the universities and threatened to retard French scholarship. Proudly referring to himself as a "free thinker" and materialist, Grenier

²²⁸ Fox, "Science, the University, and the French State in Nineteenth-Century France," 356-57; Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education*, 202.

transformed the introduction of his thesis into a political diatribe defying the interference of the imperial government in education and its attempts to stifle scientific progress.²²⁹

By 1868, Grenier was not simply a single voice in the dark. The suppression of academic freedom by the empire mobilized student opposition in the Parisian universities. Many of these students had read Taine, Comte, and the works of the German materialists, adopting the title of “free thinker” with pride to show their opposition to the regime of Moral Order and its oppressive policies. Yet unlike the moderate savants who symbolized the new scientific mentality in academia, the opposition expressed by young middle-class elites took on extremist overtones. “In the attics of the students,” Taine noted with mild horror, “in the garrets of bohemia, in the deserted offices of doctors without patients and of lawyers without clients, there are Brissots, Dantons, Marats, Robespierres, Jacobinism and Saint-Justs beginning to bloom.”²³⁰

The growing radicalism in the schools, what the socialist Benoît Malon deemed the “veritable awakening of Latin youth,”²³¹ signified the emergence of a new movement directed by middle-class elites and centered on the notions of reform and political opposition. Student newspapers became the chief organs of this protest movement, with editors circumnavigating the imperial censors, the dreaded *commission d’examen*, while they remained in print. Most of the papers had a short existence, many of the editors having their presses shut down by government officials or finding themselves serving

²²⁹ J. -P. Granier, *Du remollissement sénile du cerveau*, 2nd Ed. (Paris: A. Delahaye, 1868), 6-8, quoted in Fox, “Science, the University, and the French State in Nineteenth-Century France,” 357.

²³⁰ Edward S. Mason, *The Paris Commune: An Episode in the History of the Socialist Movements* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 9.

²³¹ Benoît Malon, *La troisième défaite du prolétariat*, quoted in Paul Lafargue, *Le droit à paresse*, Introduction by Maurice Dammanget (Paris: François Maspero, 1972), 14.

brief prison sentences for the publication of material not authorized by the government censors. Charles Longuet, editor of *Les Ecoles de France*, received a four-month prison sentence in 1864 before relocating to Brussels and launching his second and more successful journal, *La Rive gauche*. The medical student Georges Clemenceau, who was in possession of an illegal printing press at his residence on the rue du Bac, narrowly avoided arrest when authorities appeared at his door one afternoon. Clemenceau concealed the criminal device from the police at the time of their visit, and the following day threw it onto the Seine.²³²

Clemenceau had already served a short sentence in Sainte-Pélagie prison for his inflammatory article in the student publication *La Travail* and had no desire to return there. Others, however, were not as lucky, nor did they necessarily want to be. Sainte-Pélagie became a popular meeting place for like-minded student radicals such as Gustave Tridon and Germain Casse. Serving a prison sentence was in some cases even a badge of honor, a testament to one's dedication to freedom. As the young Blanquist Gaston Da Costa boasted when reflecting on his arrest in 1867, "through my polemics I was talented enough to earn my first prison sentence and a fine of 200 francs."²³³ The intransigence of the imperial regime only strengthened their resolve, linking the desire for academic freedom to that of the broader call for political freedom.

Noting the uniformity of purpose and the shared hostilities expressed by students during the 1860s, Paul Lafargue believed that he and his cohorts constituted a "new

²³² Gregor Dallas, *At the Heart of a Tiger: Clemenceau and his World, 1841-1929* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1993), 38-39.

²³³ Gaston Da Costa, *La Commune vécue* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1905), 3:361.

generation.”²³⁴ A medical student and journalist, Lafargue had come to France from his native Cuba in 1851. Classified as a *mestizos*, a Cuban of mixed racial origins, he was denied entrance to the universities on the island. Realizing that his son would lack certain social opportunities if the family remained in Cuba, Paul’s father sold his coffee plantation in Santiago and relocated to Bordeaux. Often bearing his mixed race with pride and boasting of the “Negro blood” which flowed in his veins, Lafargue associated himself with the oppressed and ostracized at a young age.²³⁵ In later years, he was to become a son-in-law to Karl Marx and a leading protagonist in the French socialist movement. In the early 1860s, however, his rebellious spirit had yet to be defined by such rigid ideological convictions or familial relations. Condemning the oppression and censorship encouraged by both Church and state, he saw himself as a part of the radical ferment taking shape within France’s frustrated middle class.

Arriving at the University of Paris, Lafargue quickly made friends with the fiery editor and journalist Charles Longuet. Longuet’s prominence in the Latin Quarter, a neighborhood encompassing the Parisian universities and student dormitories, placed Lafargue in the center of the budding student activism during the early 1860s. The garrets of Bohemian Paris at this time were a heaven for radical republicanism, socialism, and conspiratorial circles, providing a lively panorama which gave substance to the emerging culture and politics of youth.²³⁶ Lafargue’s recognition of a “new generation” appeared

²³⁴ *La Rive gauche* (1 July 1866) quoted in Leslie Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism, 1842-1882* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 21.

²³⁵ Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism*, 16-19.

²³⁶ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*, 181-212.

trenchant in such a milieu: a bohemia, according to the journalist Jules Vallès, populated with “desperate, threatening rebels.”²³⁷

This “new generation,” Longuet claimed, carried on the traditions of French student activism through “a virile hatred of servitude in all its forms.”²³⁸ The student activists of 1848, however, had been merely reformers calling for improvements in the academic community. They had not been revolutionaries, nor had they subscribed to socialist ideas.²³⁹ Lafargue’s generation, on the contrary, desired justice, freedom, and science and was willing to wage war against the forces of intellectual and political oppression to attain them. “We are strong, we are young,” claimed the law student Gustave Tridon, “we have a hunger for bread and ideas, for justice and science . . . Why should we continue to wait? Do we not have a faith, Atheism; a goal, Justice; a method, Revolution?”²⁴⁰ Science and revolution produced an intoxicating mix within these young minds, signifying, as Clemenceau believed, a natural continuation of the revolutionary tradition, because the Revolution stood for freedom in all its manifestations—intellectually and politically—and science was a weapon to wield against the onerous force of established religion.²⁴¹ “Since man has existed,” wrote Tridon, “there has been a struggle between science and faith, liberty and authority, man and God.”²⁴² The new generation coming of age under the Second Empire sought to consummate this ancient

²³⁷ Jules Vallès, *The Insurrectionist*, trans. Sandy Petrey (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971), 14.

²³⁸ Chales Longuet, “La Tradition des écoles,” *Les Ecoles de France* (31 January 1864), quoted in Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 35.

²³⁹ Gallaher, *The Students of Paris and the Revolution of 1848*, 105.

²⁴⁰ Tridon, “La Force,” 114.

²⁴¹ Dallas, *At the Heart of a Tiger*, 29.

²⁴² Tridon, “La Force,” 107.

struggle, sharing a commitment to the principles of the French Revolution and intellectual freedom.

Gustave Tridon, the son of a landowner from Dijon who showed a keen interest in rhetoric, sympathized with the radical Jacobin Jacques René Hébert, who had led a loosely-knit fringe movement during the French Revolution. Deemed the “men of blood” at the height of the Terror, the Hébertists placed the extermination of the aristocracy and the destruction of the Church at the center of their revolutionary program.²⁴³ In his panegyric to the Hébertists, Tridon lauded the group for bringing “the advent of science and reason in its most energetic and popular form.” “The science of the Girondins, of the doctrinaires, was cloistered in a lettered oligarchy; was drawn from the boudoir and exhibited on the market place. The Hébertists addressed themselves to the people and said ‘Science is your conquest, science belongs to you, come and take it.’”²⁴⁴ In publicizing his affection for the radical faction, Tridon illuminated the similarities he discerned between the Hébertists and the crusade of his own generation. Together they, like their revolutionary predecessors, would once again fight against the oppression and ignorance of the state to secure a “definitive triumph” and bring enlightenment to the oppressed masses.

Tridon’s eloquence and insight was matched by the gall and militancy of his comrade Raoul Rigault. An archetypical bohemian and fervent militant, Rigault spent his time slumming about the Latin Quarter making the acquaintance of likeminded individuals such as Jules Vallès and the brutish Théophile Ferré. When he was not

²⁴³ Geroges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution From 1793 to 1799*, trans. John Hall Stewart and James Friguglietti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 80-81.

²⁴⁴ Gustave Tridon, *Les Hébertistes*, 2nd Ed. (Paris: Chez Tous les Libraries, 1871), 16.

visiting the cafés of Bohemia, Rigault divided his leisure time between the Bibliothèque Impériale, where he perused old Jacobin pamphlets from the Revolution, and read Eugène Sue's novels about the seedy Paris underworld. His fascination with the Terror led him to dream up the design for an execution device superior to the guillotine: the first electric chair. "The guillotine is respectable," he claimed, "but much too slow, and has seen better days. It is old hat. I conceived of plans for an electric battery. It is precise; it is neat; it is quick."²⁴⁵ Rigault's extreme anticlericalism, moreover, was so pronounced that he refused to utter the word "saint." In his garbled speech the rue St. Hyacinthe became "rue Hya," while the St. Antoine district was simply "Antoine."²⁴⁶

Anticlericalism, science, and revolutionary politics provided a cohesive framework for student activism as the debates over academic freedom became politicized. Students hoping to effect change organized small clubs which met frequently in the cafés of the Latin Quarter and fraternized at Masonic lodges in Paris. While the clubs lacked direction and were easily penetrated by Napoleon III's secret police, the shared commitment to justice and freedom came to form a unifying ideology that slowly crystallized through continual meetings. The more extreme students, attracted by the prospects of revolutionary action to bring about change, found a common link with the radical Republicans who had been hiding underground, rotting in jail cells, or conducting their affairs in exile during the 1850s.

The revival of radical republicanism during the 1860s was given an impetus in 1859 when Napoleon III, hoping to pacify growing political discontent, granted amnesty

²⁴⁵ Luc Willette, *Raoul Rigault: 25 ans, communard, chef de police* (Paris: Syros, 1984), 27.

²⁴⁶ Frank Jellinek, *The Paris Commune of 1871* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1965), 23; Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*, 192..

to radicals either arrested or deemed enemies of the state after the revolution of 1848. While the concession may have relieved immediate tensions between the empire and the growing Republican opposition, it proved to have long-term consequences for the government, as dangerous political enemies and extremist Jacobins now returned to France. Exile and imprisonment had neither reformed such men nor discouraged their political ambitions. Students inspired by the atmosphere of discontent and urgency emanating from Paris readily joined ranks with the returning exiles, seeking to link their cause to the larger political ferment taking place in the capital. By 1864, various students had become familiar with men of the opposition, and the more radical elements contracted a friendship with the notorious revolutionary and *quarante-huitard* Louis Auguste Blanqui.

By the time of the Second Empire, Blanqui's political career was already well established. A revolutionary since the early days of the July Monarchy, Blanqui had spent half his life in jail, earning him the sobriquet *l'enfermé*, the "imprisoned one." "One ends by believing that everywhere are jailers, keys, 100-foot high walls, functionaries who prowl around you like devouring lions," he once wrote while serving a sentence at the dismal Mont Saint-Michel, a monastery converted into a prison on the craggy shore of the Brittany coast.²⁴⁷ Despite the psychological effects which incarceration may have had on Blanqui, it never dampened his determination. While serving time at Belle-Île-en-Mer in 1848 for conspiratorial activity, he had scoffed at prisoners' excitement over a rumor that they were to be deported to the Cayenne penal colony in French Guiana. Many inmates thought it would be easier to escape from the outpost, to which Blanqui coolly

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Harsin, *Barricades*, 236.

rejoined “In order to escape, you first have to arrive in Cayenne.” As Blanqui attempted to convince the prisoners that the government would have them drowned on the way, one inmate interrupted, asking “Do you really think the government would dare?” “Well, if it does not dare,” he replied flatly, “it will be making a mistake.”²⁴⁸

Such paranoid delusions and expressions of iron conviction were characteristic of Blanqui’s image. A mythology had grown up around him, recounting the story of a young man who had given up a comfortable career and the amenities of bourgeois life for the higher calling of dedication to freedom and the Revolution. The mention of Blanqui’s name was said to strike fear into the hearts of the bourgeoisie. “He had sunken, withered cheeks, white lips, and a sickly malign, dirty look like a pallid corpse,” the politician Alexis de Tocqueville related when describing him. “He looked as if he had lived in a sewer and had only just emerged.”²⁴⁹ In spite of the popular rumor that the black gloves Blanqui always wore hid bloodstained fingernails or claims that his eyes were clouded with bile and gore, the journalist Jules Vallès was surprised to find that “his hand was clean and his eyes clear. This shaker of human earth looked like an elementary-school teacher.”²⁵⁰

Vallès’s reference to Blanqui as a teacher was apt, for the students coming to Blanqui by the mid-1860s saw him as such. Paul Lafargue claimed that Blanqui “provided the revolutionary education” for his generation.²⁵¹ The rumors of a sinister and evasive character constantly involved in conspiratorial activity gave way to a warmer

²⁴⁸ Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution* (Boston: Little Brown, 1939), 47.

²⁴⁹ J. P. Mayer, ed., *The Reflections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 130.

²⁵⁰ Vallès, *The Insurrectionist*, 120.

²⁵¹ *La Révolution Française* (20 April 1879) quoted in Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism*, 24.

conception. With his canescent locks and beard, his almost paternal disposition, and his soft voice, the old revolutionary who was the scourge of respectable bourgeois society came to serve as a father-figure to many of these middle-class youths, affectionately referred to as “*le vieux*,” the old man.

The young following that slowly formed around the “imprisoned one” first became acquainted with the vintage Jacobin during their frequent stays in Saint-Pélagie, where Blanqui was serving a four-year sentence for subversion. In his cell, Blanqui would read and play chess with inmates, often initiating conversation to pass the ponderous days of captivity. Many of the students who circulated through the jail were anxious to meet with the notorious revolutionary, and men such as Tridon and Clemenceau struck up friendships with him that would extend beyond the walls of the prison. They often returned once released to bring him books and news of events outside Saint-Pélagie. When transferred to the Necker Hospital on the rue de Sèvres in March 1864, Blanqui continued to receive visits in his new room from those he had impressed while in prison. On 27 August 1865, this young entourage aided the old man’s escape from the hospital, dressing him in a blond wig and long overcoat before leaving together as though he were just another visitor.²⁵²

Once out of jail, Blanqui hid at a friend’s house in Brussels and immediately began forming the nucleus of a small party composed of his most loyal followers. Imbued with an inveterate materialism, Blanqui’s views on politics, revolution, and science found sympathy with his young followers. Raised in an age in which each new scientific discovery struck a blow against established religion, Blanqui was convinced that “the

²⁵² Samuel Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 259-61.

nineteenth century will only justify itself through Science.”²⁵³ He associated the pursuit of science with the destruction of the Church as a political and moral force in society. It was through empirical science and experience, he stressed, that the individual gained knowledge of material reality. Blanqui had read the German materialists, such as Karl Vogt and Ludwig Büchner, and through their analysis of the physical sciences came to the conclusion that man was capable of forging his own destiny by overthrowing the spiritual doctrines of the Christian Church which preached docility and subservience.²⁵⁴ Unlike savants concerned solely with advancing scientific knowledge, however, Blanqui was not content with merely formulating epistemological truths. He saw in the material sciences laws that could be applied to social and political contexts.

The Positivists had drawn similar conclusions, perceiving in science the means for a “social physics” which could order and guide society. As a staunch materialist, however, Blanqui held nothing but contempt for the moral outlook of Positivism. Although confirming the attainment of truth through the study of the material world, Positivism had contaminated its objective stance, in Blanqui’s assessment, by infusing it with elements of spirituality. “The only thing of value in Positivism is its materialism,” he charged. “Remove this quality and all that remains is erroneous and presumptuous. Nothing can show better [than Positivism] the validity of materialism and yet, strangely enough! it refuses to conclude and deal with the materialism of metaphysics.” Positivism was, therefore, “the very model of negation,” a “systematic skepticism to the point of

²⁵³ Alan B. Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 60.

²⁵⁴ Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui*, 29-30; Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864-1893* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 38-39.

absurdity, dressed up as a religion.”²⁵⁵ Under Blanqui’s strict metaphysical views, society was structured by universal laws that accorded with the principles endemic to all matter. Contrary to the notion of a harmonious and ordered world upheld by the Positivists, there existed antithesis and struggle. “The universe is at once life and death,” he affirmed, “destruction and creation, change and stability, chaos and response . . . it is a perpetual becoming.”²⁵⁶ This notion of destruction, change and “perpetual becoming” provided the basis for Blanqui’s theories on revolutionary politics.

In *Force and Matter*, Büchner had posited that human consciousness was the product of external stimuli and experience, rendering it “extensible, divisible, and changing.”²⁵⁷ Blanqui accepted this analysis, believing that man’s consciousness could be shaped through external sources, producing ingrained cognitive concepts which would become universal. The human mind was, therefore, the fundamental agent of social change and could be altered through education, leading Blanqui to claim that “the perfection of brain and civilization” were inextricably linked.²⁵⁸ Such a transformation could only be carried out, he believed, through the establishment of a revolutionary dictatorship in which the radical avant-garde inculcated the masses and led them to true freedom and equality. For Blanqui, revolution accorded with the scientific principles of the universe. It was spontaneous and destructive, bringing forth a “new form” that replaced the “old, decrepit society.” Revolution was a “creative phenomenon,” moreover,

²⁵⁵ Louis Auguste Blanqui, “Contre Le Positivism,” *Instructions pour une prise d’armes, L’Éternité par les astres, hypothèse astronomique, et autres textes*, ed., Migeul Abensour (Paris: Société encyclopédique française, 1972), 111, 103.

²⁵⁶ Louis Auguste Blanqui, *L’Éternité par les astres* (Paris: Libraire Germer Baillière, 1872), 72.

²⁵⁷ Vitzthum, *Materialism*, 118.

²⁵⁸ Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui*, 42-43.

necessitating violent change through conspiratorial tactics.²⁵⁹ “Weapons and organization,” Blanqui stated, “these are the decisive elements of progress, the real means by which to end misery. He who has iron has bread.”²⁶⁰

Thus, atheism and a revolutionary metaphysical idealism comprised the message which the old Jacobin imparted to his young followers, and many accepted it. Gustave Tridon, one of Blanqui’s most loyal disciples, reiterated his teacher’s stance, associating science with the revolutionary tradition and affirming that science, like liberty itself, could only come about by overthrowing the oppressive state and the Church.²⁶¹ “The progress of ideas is only hindered by the Christians who burn free thinkers today,” he claimed: “Killing and gagging is the easiest of politics.”²⁶² True freedom could not be achieved through spiritual means but was rather “a matter of blood and bone.”²⁶³ The Church, according to Tridon, had imposed a millennium of intellectual darkness and political oppression upon man, eclipsing the virtues of the classical world.²⁶⁴ Religion constituted “the absolute subjugation of life and thought to the principle of God . . . defiance hurled at reason and nature.” Atheism, in contrast, stood for progress, absorbing “all the fog in the human spirit” and driving man “further beyond all perfection.”²⁶⁵

The French Revolution played a central role in the Blanquists’ conception of historical progress and social change. Serving as the moment at which man rose up and

²⁵⁹ Louis Auguste Blanqui, “Sur la révolution,” in *Œuvres complètes: écrits sur la révolution* (Paris: Éditions galilée, 1977), 307-08.

²⁶⁰ Blanqui, “Avis au peuple,” *Œuvres complètes*, 331.

²⁶¹ Tridon, “La force,” 107-08.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁶³ Tridon, *Les Hébertistes*, 36.

²⁶⁴ Gustave Tridon, *Du molochisme juif: études critiques et philosophiques* (Bruxelles: E. Maheu, 1884), xii-xvi.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, v-vii, ix.

attempted to overthrow the outlook and institutions of the Middle Ages, the Revolution signified the collective will of the people triumphing over the onerous forces of institutionalized oppression. It was the point of departure heralding a new epoch in the history of mankind.²⁶⁶ To consummate the fruits of the Revolution the individual had to be educated in order to realize his full potential. For Blanqui, education constituted the only “real revolutionary agent,” allowing man to march forward and progress socially.²⁶⁷ “Revolution must be social and not political,” claimed Paul Lafargue; “And education is the most powerful revolutionary force that I know.”²⁶⁸

The extreme anticlericalism and student activism of the Blanquists forged a close relationship with the like-minded Free Thought Movement [*La Libre Pensée*]. The movement was initially sponsored by French academics such as Louis Asseline and André Lefèvre, who were interested in the work of the German materialists. Attracting students and activists, the Free Thought Movement grew to become one of the principle agents of anticlerical demonstrations and radical atheism.²⁶⁹ The primary liaison between the two groups was Dr. Albert Regnard, an intern at the Hôpital de la Charité in Paris and a renowned medical student in neurology. A Blanquist sympathizer, Regnard had been instrumental in defending the student medical society at the School of Medicine against the meddlesome dean Ambroise Tardieu. In 1865, he published the first French translation of Büchner’s *Force and Matter*, which became an instant success.²⁷⁰ Like the Blanquists, Regnard shared an appreciation for the German materialists and praised

²⁶⁶ Tridon, *Les Hébertistes*, 15-19.

²⁶⁷ Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui*, 54.

²⁶⁸ Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism*, 26.

²⁶⁹ André Lefèvre, *La Renaissance du matérialisme* (Paris: O. Doin, 1881), 115-134.

²⁷⁰ Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition*, 41.

Büchner's book as a "catechism of youth."²⁷¹ Together, the Blanquists and the Free Thought Movement shared a dedication to education, atheism, and scientific progress, subjects which became a great controversy in November 1865 when the two organizations participated in the Student Congress at Liège.

Called by the General Student's Association, a radical organization known for its atheism and anticlericalism, the International Student Congress was intended to serve as a forum to address questions of "vital interest to the future of the young generation and to the future of the country." Traditional and agnostic spokesmen were asked to attend, but when they declined, more radical youths became the dominant force at the congress. Through Paul Lafargue, who was on the organizational committee of Parisian students making plans to attend, the Blanquists were invited and urged to make their ideas heard. In addition to Lafargue, Germain Casse, Ernest Granger, Charles-Victor Jaclard, Eugène Protot, and Tridon all attended and used the gathering as a platform for their extreme views. Students of the Blanquist delegation marched into the meeting hall carrying a black flag instead of the French Tricolor, a symbol of France mourning for liberty. Once debates got under way, they attracted much of the attention with ribald antics and fiery declarations. Stating his contempt for established religion, Lafargue went on to speak of the current intellectual atmosphere in France, claiming "Science does not deny God. It does better; it renders him useless War on God! That is progress!"²⁷² The uproar at Liège caused a commotion, and the congress was forced to end early, yet not before many of the radicals in attendance had a chance to fraternize and discuss vague plans for

²⁷¹ Ludwig Büchner, *Force et matière; ou, principes de l'ordre de l'univers*, 16th Ed., trans. Albert Regnard (Paris: C. Reinwald, 1886), xxxii.

²⁷² *La Rive gauche* (5 November 1865), quoted in Lafargue, *Le droit à la paresse*, Maurice Dommanget (introduction), 15.

the creation of an international free thought organization, tentatively named *Agis comme tu pense* [Act As You Think].²⁷³

The event across the Belgian frontier did not go unnoticed by Napoleon III, who was furious at the publicized show of opposition. The Council Académique of Paris summoned the student participants before it in December, but only a single person acknowledged the summons. This refusal to appear infuriated the Council, which summarily expelled seven students for desecrating the national flag and attacking the “principles of social order.” Those expelled appealed the Council’s ruling, denying that the body had any right to pass judgment on events which occurred outside France’s national borders. When the appeal was denied, Casse, Lafargue, and Jaclard were all expelled from the University of Paris in perpetuity and from all other French universities for a period of two years. Albert Regnard was dismissed from the hospital in Paris and forced to take up his studies in Strasbourg.²⁷⁴

The decision of the Council Académique did not dissipate student radicalism. Instead, it fostered a stronger resolve for action. Once news of the expulsions became known, protests broke out in the Latin Quarter. Indignant students disrupted lectures and openly heckled professors. The constant disturbances prompted the government to send in the police to maintain order. The sight of armed officers aroused further protests and led to street brawls between students and the police. Massed outside the university buildings, mobs called for the dismissal of the rigid dean of the medical school, Tardieu, as police beat back the lines of students thronging the streets. As the crowd became more

²⁷³ Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism*, 26; Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition*, 41.

²⁷⁴ Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism*, 30-31.

raucous, Tardieu went into hiding, hoping to avoid any confrontation with the agitated protesters. In such a heated atmosphere students were forced to show identification cards or matriculation papers in order to enter academic buildings, and by late December classes were canceled altogether. Unable to quell the situation, Duruy reluctantly gave in to the students' demands and dismissed Tardieu. Appeasement brought a reprieve, and with the coming of winter recess, the protest movement petered out.²⁷⁵

The crisis in the Latin Quarter alerted conservatives to the growing threat within the state universities. Catholics quickly stepped up their complaints, claiming the recent unruliness revealed the need for stricter controls in academia. Dupanloup denounced the pernicious influences taking root in the lecture halls, claiming atheism and materialism were against God, the human soul, and the principles of moral and social order. The growing popularity of such beliefs signaled a “veritable invasion” of dangerous notions in the classrooms of the nation.²⁷⁶ In the summer of 1867, citizens in the provincial town of Saint-Etienne drew up a petition complaining about the books in the local *bibliothèque populaire*. Stacked upon the shelves were the detestable works of such writers as Voltaire, Rousseau, Renan, and the anarchist Jean-Pierre Proudhon, which, the petition claimed, were detrimental to religion, morality, and public order. The concerned citizens demanded that the library be closed to protect public morality and prevent the spread of depraved ideas. When the Senate opened debate on the petition, however, the moderate

²⁷⁵ *Le Temps* (21 December 1865), cited in Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection*, 267; Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism*, 30; Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 35.

²⁷⁶ Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Correspondance Générale*, ed. Jean Bonnerot (Paris: Privat Didier, 1975), 17:291.

senator Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve defended the library on the floor during the session.

A respected literary critic who had once justified the imperial regime's censorship with his assertion that there were "worse maladies than the loss of speech," Sainte-Beuve was a conservative Republican easily converted to Bonapartism after 1851.²⁷⁷ "I had idealized the Empire," he confessed to a friend. "I could have wished each day that the Emperor would do something new and good, something unexpected. This was my programme, and whenever it was not adhered to and fulfilled, I suffered like a playwright whose actors were ruining his lines and distorting his characters."²⁷⁸ Although he had received the favor of the imperial government, the aged literary critic still possessed some of his characteristic flippancy. Once known to have shown up at a duel in the pouring rain with an umbrella, declaring he was prepared to be "shot dead but not soaking wet," Sainte-Beuve was not a man to stray from confrontation when challenged. While willing to stand behind the regime's commitment to order, he would not support the stifling of free intellectual discourse. Now on the floor of the senate in 1868, he unleashed some of his old fire as he voiced his reservations, giving an eloquent speech defending the works of Voltaire and Renan, urging the encouragement of free thought, and reiterating the empire's duty to defend the rights acquired by the French Revolution.²⁷⁹

Although Sainte-Beuve's words drew rebuke from the Senate, students from the École Normale Supérieure wrote a letter of congratulation for his vigorous defense of free thought. To make a point of the matter, two of the students had the letter published in

²⁷⁷ Williams, *Gaslights and Shadow*, 134.

²⁷⁸ Galantière, *The Goncourt Journals*, 361.

²⁷⁹ George McLean Harper, *Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1909), 356-57.

the opposition paper *L'Avenir national*. When the director of the school, a conventional and insipid character named Désiré Nisard, saw the publication, he immediately suspended the two students responsible for sending the letter to the press. Protesting what they believed to be a further egregious blow against freedom of thought by the government, the *normaliens* staged a strike. Memories of the student protest that rocked the Latin Quarter in 1865 were still fresh in people's minds and aroused concern that the affair could balloon into a large-scale demonstration unless immediate action was taken. Empress Eugénie, weary of the constant problems caused by the raucous students at the school, threatened to close down the *École Normale Supérieure* permanently. Although aware that such a feat was beyond Eugénie's power, Duruy quickly stepped in to pacify the infuriated empress by suspending the entire student body to avoid conflict. To console the *normaliens'* resentment over such an action, Nisard was sacked and replaced with the more moderate Francisque Bouillier.²⁸⁰

In spite of Duruy's severe measures, students were only emboldened by Nisard's dismissal to continue their agitation. In 1870, the Paris medical faculty became the next focal point of student activism when Pierre Bonaparte, a member of the imperial family, shot dead the journalist Victor Noir. Republicans exploited Noir's death as a rallying call for the opposition, staging a massive funeral march through the capital in which Republican deputies, Blanquists, radicals, and students participated, marching side by side in a unified expression of contempt for the Second Empire. "These were fragments of an army seeking other fragments," reported Jules Vallès, "shreds of a Republic stuck

²⁸⁰ Désiré Nisard, *Souvenirs et Notes biographiques* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1888), 2:61-65; Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 37; Horvath-Peterson, *Victory Duruy and French Education*, 100-01.

together by the dead man's blood, the beast that Prudhomme calls the hydra of anarchy extending its thousand heads, all held to the body by a single idea, hot coals of anger glowing deep in two thousand eyes."²⁸¹ Ambroise Tardieu, former dean of the medical school and now professor of forensic medicine, gave expert testimony at Pierre Bonaparte's trial which led to the exoneration of the defendant. When the verdict became known, students began disrupting lectures with calls of "Vive Victor Noir!" causing a commotion that eventually forced the medical faculty to close for a month.²⁸²

The Victor Noir affair revealed the extent to which the lines between political opposition and the cause of academic freedom had become blurred. After the closure of the medical faculty, the Republican deputy Jules Ferry addressed the Corps législatif, warning that the small freedoms that remained in the universities were now in danger of being entirely suppressed.²⁸³ Sainte-Beuve, worried over the growing tension between clerical interests and educational demands, again stressed before the Senate that the quest for science had to be considered independent of political concerns and had to be encouraged even if it meant accepting materialism. "I comprehend quite well the social theory which declares that a people without religion is a people in decadence," he stated. "But this is not the question. We have no choice. Whether we groan over it or not, faith has departed; whatever men may say, science has ruined faith At this juncture there is only one thing to do, if we would not languish and moulder in decadence: we must pass over quickly and march resolutely towards an order of reasonable, probable, connected ideas, which shall give convictions in place of beliefs, and which, while leaving full

²⁸¹ Vallès, *The Insurrectionist*, 91.

²⁸² Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 40.

²⁸³ Fox, "Science, the University, and the French State in Nineteenth-Century France," 101.

liberty and security to the remnants of faith that surround it, shall prepare a point of support for the future in all fresh and robust minds.”²⁸⁴ In the twilight of the Second Empire, the issue of academic freedom which had been championed by radical middle-class activists was now being adopted by the political opposition and moderates calling for reform.

The fight for academic freedom not only fueled the reform movement but also comported with the ideological tenets of republicanism, especially anticlericalism. “Vicars are agitating, bishops are writing, cardinals are speaking, priests are proliferating,” contended the scathing Republican journalist Henri Rochefort in 1868. “Today the clergy holds France in its iron grip.”²⁸⁵ The strong link between Church and state under the Second Empire was highlighted by the controversy regarding science in academic curricula. The cause of academic freedom gave both students and radicals a target for their attacks on the government and personified the struggle of the French Revolution in condemning clerical influence on the regime. While science and freedom of thought devised a rallying point around which anticlericalism and revolutionary ideology could be articulated, they also came to structure the ideological conceptions of radicals as well. Materialist and metaphysical notions of universality and violent transformation became the basis of a revolutionary program predicated upon scientific principles that encouraged a belief in struggle rather than harmony. “The past and the future are in the present,” wrote Tridon, “and whoever is not for the Revolution will be against it tomorrow.”²⁸⁶ “The battle has commenced,” Raoul Rigault declared in his

²⁸⁴ Harper, *Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve*, 358.

²⁸⁵ Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 252.

²⁸⁶ Tridon, “La Force,” 107.

newspaper *Le Démocrate*. “It is a battle to the death. The battle to the death between the people and the enemies of the people is engaged. It cannot finish until one of the two parties annihilates the other.”²⁸⁷ This agonial perception was conducive to the establishment of relations between frustrated students and political opponents of the government, producing a powerful opposition movement to the Second Empire by the late 1860s headed by middle-class elites.

Yet the joining of academic frustrations and the opposition movement was in no way foreordained. The radicalism which grew up in the universities during the 1860s was a response to the education policies of the Second Empire. The Bonapartist obsession with order after 1848 bred a narrowly defined agenda which ultimately provoked unrest in the middle class rather than creating a bulwark against it, as had been hoped. The Catholic alliance, which was prized in the early 1850s and became a stumbling block a decade later, hindered the government from adopting a more moderate policy once it became necessary to do so. As the Empress Eugénie claimed, the regime’s freedom of action was so hampered by 1869 that it could not even “sneeze.”²⁸⁸ While Napoleon III made overtures to the opposition, as with the appointment of Victor Duruy to the education ministry in 1863, he rarely bothered to follow up on them, leaving liberal reformers isolated among conservative and reactionary forces.

It was Duruy who said, “All governments except the violent are good when they accord with the interests and ideas of the moment.”²⁸⁹ While the Second Empire did not use recourse to violence, its continual stance against the incorporation of modern

²⁸⁷ *Le Démocrate* (3 December 1868) quoted in Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, 38.

²⁸⁸ Horvath-Peterson, *Victor Duruy and French Education*, 248.

²⁸⁹ Duruy, *Notes et souvenirs*, 1:52.

scientific ideas into the education curriculum revealed a reluctance to accord with the intellectual trends of its age. The optimism and unity of vision expressed by men like Taine and Renan during the 1850s became a battle cry for a generation of new thinkers. Suppression brought reaction as the “new generation” transformed its cause into a crusade against oppression and intellectual parochialism, producing a revolutionary movement that spanned from the grass roots activism of the universities to the political arena of the imperial state.

Chapter Three

Old Ends and New Means

During the month of February 1853, the lawyer and future politician Emile Ollivier visited the salon of Marie de Flavigny, Comtesse d'Agoult, better known in Parisian circles by the pseudonym Daniel Stern. In attendance at Agoult's soiree were some of the future luminaries of the Republican Party, of which Ollivier was one. Since the coup d'état of 1851, Agoult's *Maison Rose* on the upper Champs Elysée provided a regular meeting place for republican elites. There, they were able to discuss politics and social issues without fear of interference from the imperial police. "The general mood of these meetings," Ollivier noted, "is full of sadness and boredom for present things, fear rather than optimism for the future."²⁹⁰ This dark period marked, indeed, the nadir of republican fervor. The Republic had been lost in 1852 with the promulgation of the Second Empire, and the Republican Party itself was in a state of disarray, with many of its leaders driven into exile or forced underground by Napoleon III.

Despite the sense of despair and stagnation which characterized the Republican movement in the early 1850s, frequent meetings and constant dialogue between Republican elites during this period would provide the roots of the Republican renaissance during the 1860s. Writing from exile in 1869, the philosopher Jules Barni claimed that "the republican idea is accepted today, and the thing itself is awaited. Sooner

²⁹⁰ Emile Ollivier, *Journal*, 1:145.

or later it will arrive, and it will be up to us to make it live.”²⁹¹ Such optimism was nearly unimaginable a decade earlier, when Republican ideas remained confined to the small salons hosted by socialites such as the Comtesse d’Agoult. The reawakening of the Republican spirit was the product of a new generation of thinkers, “young Republicans” [*jeunes républicains*] who distinguished themselves from the older generation of *quarante-huitards* that had presided over the failure of the Second Republic. In rethinking the Republican project, they marginalized the “social question” of the 1840s, which sought to address the plight of the French proletariat. They focused attention instead on respect for law, the promotion of progress, and the creation of a modern, secular and democratic political state. The influence of Positivism upon the generation of the 1860s was, moreover, substantial, giving substance to the aspirations of the *jeune républicain* movement and providing a logical conception of modern society, both socially and politically, for Republican and bourgeois elites.

The emergence of a new Republican “elite” played a central role in the reshaping of Republican ideology after 1848, as moderates aimed to synthesize Republican objectives with specific class interests. “It is universally recognized,” claimed the economist and future minister of finance under Napoleon III, Michel Chevalier, in 1835, “that the middle class rules in France.”²⁹² In spite of Chevalier’s certainty of bourgeois hegemony during the July Monarchy, his prognosis was nonetheless premature. Only with the growth of capital and industry under the Second Empire would a middle class emerge that possessed the material resources and numerical capacity to assert a strong

²⁹¹ Quoted in Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 242.

²⁹² Quoted in Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic*, 4.

political influence in France. It was this broadening middle class which would produce the future elites of the Republican Party, men of bourgeois origins and affiliations who came to interpret the core values of Republicanism in terms consistent with the culture and principles of their own class. As capital and industrial expansion consolidated the social and economic position of this new middling bourgeoisie—what the Republican Léon Gambetta would deem the “*nouvelle couche sociale*”—Republican elites formulated a social program which utilized popular conceptions of science and progress to promote democratic and secular values, as well as discourage political violence. In defining their vision of modern society, the *jeunes républicains* consciously created an ideological system that comported with the hegemonic ambitions and social outlook of the new French bourgeoisie coming of age under the Second Empire.²⁹³

The Republicans advocating this new polity were rarely Jacobins or revolutionary extremists. Even the most militant political thinkers within such circles, like the passionate Jacques Peyrat, disdained the tactics employed by radicals such as the Blanquists. “Raoul Rigault, Germain Casse, both of whom terrify the bourgeois,” seethed Peyrat, “. . . [these types] have strayed quite far from our ideas.”²⁹⁴ Contrary to radical desires for violent change, moderates sought to make the Republican form of government appealing to both conservatives and the liberal-minded bourgeoisie. Having learned from the experience of 1848, practical Republican thinkers desired to dissociate themselves from the revolutionaries who had driven the middle class into the arms of Louis Napoleon and the Party of Moral Order. Revolution was, moreover, inimical to bourgeois

²⁹³ Charle, *Histoire sociale de la France*, 130-33; Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic*, 7-10; Jean Bouvier, *Histoire sociale et histoire économique* (Geneva: Droz, 1968), 32-34.

²⁹⁴ Juliette Adam (Juliette Lamber), *Mes sentiments*, 34.

interests, a point strongly underscored in the criticism of insurrectionary methods by Republican elites of the *jeune républicain* movement. Giving a speech in his native Loiret, Adolphe Couchery claimed that “for us all revolution would be ruinous. Our lands would lose value; our capital invested in enterprises would be swallowed up in the tempest. No! Never a revolution.”²⁹⁵

In the hope of rendering Republican principles moderate and pragmatic, the new generation of Republicans growing up under the Second Empire urged the use of reason in political action, supporting notions of a smooth and continuous progression toward democracy over the dialectical thinking endemic to radical Republican ideology. “I believe in the success of our efforts,” wrote Ollivier in a letter to a friend, “to avoid in our country the shock of a new revolution through the foundation of liberty.”²⁹⁶ In renouncing revolutionary tactics, the *jeunes républicaines* ultimately sought to purge the popular myths of the Convention and the “revolutionary tradition” from Republican ideology, replacing them with the more modest and democratic aims of 1789.²⁹⁷ “Our political education is long in coming, but it is nonetheless advancing,” declared Léonide Babaud-Larivière. “[The] excellence of the great principles of 1789 is better appreciated, and everyone understands that these principles are the safeguard of the wealth and happiness we have conquered at the cost of so many efforts.”²⁹⁸

The resulting schism between radicals and moderates was not, however, merely a question of method. Deeper ideological convictions, as well, served to accentuate growing differences in Republican circles. While scientific views were incorporated into

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Price, *The French Second Empire*, 350.

²⁹⁶ Ollivier, *Journal*, 2:135.

²⁹⁷ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, 294-97.

²⁹⁸ Léonide Babaud-Larivière, *Lettres Charentaises* (Marseille: Laffitte, 1979), 2:133.

Republican outlooks on both sides, a divide was evident between the strict materialism of revolutionaries and student activists and the moral and progressive thinking of moderates. Influenced by the spirit of Comte's Positivism, the political thinkers of the *jeune républicain* movement proclaimed that modern society had to be conceived of under sociological and scientific principles. "There is only one thing which could serve as the foundation to a truly human society," declared the young Léon Gambetta, ". . . and that is science."²⁹⁹ This strong belief in the value of science and scientific thinking produced, in turn, a new political realism in the writings of Republican theorists. No longer could action be guided by strict ideology or idealism; experimentation, analysis, and flexibility—what would become known as "opportunism" under the Third Republic—were perceived to be the new principles needed in bringing forth the republic and promoting social order and progress. "The *jeunes républicains* . . . possessed a horror of sentimental chimeras," noted Juliette Adam, a woman of strong Republican conviction, "understanding that they could no longer judge each fact according to a formula, but according to its possible results."³⁰⁰

Many of these ideas were derived from Positivism's influence on Republican circles during the 1850s and 1860s. Comte himself had initially conceived of his philosophy as a natural corollary to Republicanism, stressing Positivism's revolutionary heritage, the need for rationalism in politics, and a belief in morality as a guiding precept in political action. That Republicans and positivists could find a common accord was, therefore, not surprising. One young positivist eagerly connected Republican aspirations

²⁹⁹ John Eros, "The Positivist Generation of French Republicanism," *The Sociological Review* 3, no.1 (July 1955): 265.

³⁰⁰ Adam, *Mes sentiments et nos idées*, 48.

with those of positive philosophy, writing, “The republic is the form of government that, by its sheer elasticity, is best adapted to the incessant modifications of modern times.”³⁰¹ Republican interest in Positivism was so extensive during the Second Empire that Juliette Adam complained discussions at her salons were constantly occupied with the natural “agreement between positive philosophy and Republican ideas.”³⁰²

The basis for the relationship between Positivism and Republicanism was grounded in Comte’s interest in social issues. Once the spirit of Positivism was “rightly understood,” he believed, it led to an aspiration far beyond scientific curiosity: “the object, namely, of organizing human life.”³⁰³ In accordance with his belief in the inexorable advancement of historical stages, Comte alleged that the end of history—the positive stage—would be affirmed by the attainment of man's supreme intellectual and moral summit. “Nothing can hold back modern thinking, progressive civilization, and progressive science,” claimed Comte’s disciple, Emile Littré. “At each step, in spite of numerous incidents or the misfortunes which may befall a particular nation, we see that innovation advances and backwardness declines.”³⁰⁴ The inevitable progression toward the positive stage of history was, however, not deterministic and required human agency to facilitate the “natural forces” leading toward it.³⁰⁵ Progress, as understood within the context of Positivism, meant “development,” indicating the evolution of man's intellectual and moral faculties. As the scientific naturalist understood the development and evolution of biological life toward higher organic forms, so too did Comte believe in the natural

³⁰¹ Quoted in Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 320.

³⁰² Juliette Adam (Juliette Lamber), *Mes premières armes: littéraires et politiques* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1904), 5.

³⁰³ Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 62.

³⁰⁴ Emile Littré, *Conservation Révolution Positivisme* (Paris: Ladrance, 1852), 90.

³⁰⁵ Emile Littré, *De la Philosophie Positive*, 54.

development of human consciousness. In the positivist stage, this evolutionary trend would provide for a truer and more scientific understanding of man and the laws governing the society in which he lived. As a result, social concerns would be placed above individual interests, establishing the grounds for a social physics, or sociology, capable of ordering and perfecting social life.³⁰⁶

The establishment of this progressive and constructive polity was, in the eyes of the positivists, a natural outcome of the French Revolution, reinforcing the conception of implacable historical forces leading human civilization toward its teleological end. Nineteenth-century Europe, plagued by social and political instability, remained haunted by the ghosts of 1789, indicating the need for new social principles to guide modern society. The Revolution, in Comte's assessment, had destroyed the old social and political system without arriving at any fixed set of new principles to replace it. France was now bitterly divided between the reactionary and revolutionary parties, paralyzing the nation as the extremes of despotism and anarchy resulted in havoc and undermined stability. Thus, the Revolution was the "most decisive crisis of human evolution," in Comte's evaluation, necessitating a "second revolutionary phase" in which the "reorganization of principles and of life" would be effectively carried out and allow for the true aspirations of 1789 to be realized.³⁰⁷ In the current period, progress remained tied to radical and revolutionary objectives, while order increasingly took the form of a "retrograde" reactionism that incessantly attempted to re-impose the old and defunct

³⁰⁶ Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, ed., Michel Serres (Paris: Hermann, 1975), 2:124, 136.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:697; Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 91.

system in order to stave off anarchy. "As long as Progress tends toward anarchy," Comte warned, "so long will Order continue to be retrograde."³⁰⁸

In order to close the Pandora's Box which the Revolution had opened, a political structure was needed in which progress was not violent and order not static: a system in which both order and progress were necessarily inseparable aspects of a single principle guiding the policies of the modern political state.³⁰⁹ Comte claimed that his conclusions were based upon sound scientific reasoning, stating "Order and progress must be rigorously indivisible in social physics, as the ideas of organization and life are in biology, whence . . . they obviously derive."³¹⁰ All the political and intellectual movements since the Revolution had been preparing the way for the "spiritual reorganization" of society. A "philosophical initiative" was needed, however, which would structure this process of reorganization.³¹¹ Positivism was, ultimately, the philosophical system capable of carrying out such a transformation, providing a harmonious structure that united philosophical and scientific methodologies and extended them to morality and politics while concomitantly realizing the highest point of man's historical development.

Intellectually, the positive method established complete homogeneity within human understanding by presenting objective and irrefutable knowledge through scientific analysis and logical coherence. Doubt and skepticism were, therefore, eliminated. In turn,

³⁰⁸ Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 77.

³⁰⁹ G. H. Lewes, *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences: Being an Exposition of the Principles of the Cours de Philosophie Positive of Auguste Comte* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), 234.

³¹⁰ Quoted in Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1:606.

³¹¹ Comte, *Cours de Philosophie positive*, 2:611.

intellectual development led to the awareness of a new moral sentiment, as the sciences turned their attention to the social organism. The advent of sociology, a product of positive thinking according to Comte, would subordinate imagination to scientific scrutiny, ensuring that reason would assume "the reins of human government."³¹² A conception of society in its totality would be formed, engendering a sentiment of social solidarity.³¹³ "To the Positivist," Comte claimed, "the object of Morals is to make our sympathetic instincts preponderate as far as possible over the selfish instincts, social feelings over personal feelings."³¹⁴ From this moral sentiment a notion of "humanity" would emerge, a concept superseding the idea of God in the human mind. "The moral properties inherent in the great conception of God could not be suitably replaced by those included in the vague entity of nature," affirmed Comte; "but they are, on the contrary, necessarily inferior in intensity and in stability to those which characterize the inalterable notion of humanity, which is finally presiding . . . over the satisfaction of all our intellectual and social needs in the full maturity of our collective organism."³¹⁵

Man's concern with the collective and the social would, therefore, be the guiding spiritual force in the positive state, serving as a guarantee of a rational and ordered society while establishing the prerequisites for political transformation. Comte believed that his philosophical system realized the "highest aspirations of Medieval Catholicism" while simultaneously recognizing the "Revolutionary spirit," thereby uniting the spiritual and temporal and promoting order and progress within modern society.³¹⁶ Dogmatic

³¹² Ibid., 2:124.

³¹³ Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 687.

³¹⁴ Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 98.

³¹⁵ Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 2:715.

³¹⁶ Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 116.

considerations and metaphysical atheism, which produced an individualistic sense of morality rather than a social one, were rejected outright.³¹⁷ The spiritual reconstruction of society was, in Comte's view, imperative and could not follow the task of political reconstruction. In order to reconcile order and progress, the spiritual had first to provide the guiding principles by which to mold subsequent political institutions. The reverse process would result in the "total absence" of any definite principles and perpetuate revolutionary turmoil since the intellectual and moral regeneration of society would not be properly established.³¹⁸

In sum, Comte's Positivism stressed an historical trend toward intellect and reason, signifying the triumph of the higher human faculties. The relentless march of progress heralded an age in which industrial society would satisfy the needs of the people, where scientific thinking became concerned with social questions and humanity and where morality served as the basis for social and political relations. Thus, Positivism was a process of "democratization" construed within a broad scope.³¹⁹ It provided, furthermore, a new intellectual and moral basis for the rejuvenated society of the future, calling for a gradual transformation in which the necessary moral and spiritual framework was cultivated and freely accepted by the people while providing the basis for the eventual political transformation to come. In outlining such a vast and comprehensive program, Comte and his disciples drew from a wide array of political thought: the importance of political and social order and the need for religion within society stressed by the conservative Legitimists, the ideals of democracy and collectivity articulated by

³¹⁷ Emile Littré, *Paroles de philosophie positive* (Paris: Delahays, 1859), 31.

³¹⁸ Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 124.

³¹⁹ Stanislas Aquarone, *The Life and Works of Émile Littré 1801-1881* (Leyden: A. W. Sythoff, 1958), 25-26.

socialist thinkers, and the emphasis upon reason and intellectual freedom championed by the Republicans.³²⁰ In its final analysis, Positivism was a system capable of attracting the broad spectrum of dissident political ideologies within France and uniting them under a common doctrine which promoted harmony and order, a notion which Napoleon III himself possessed and which led Comte to rally to the Second Empire once it was proclaimed in 1852.

Yet before the coup of 2 December, Comte continually affirmed his allegiance to the Republican cause. Positivism identified with the ideals of 1789 and saw the Revolution as a profound moment in world history, both central themes within Republican ideology. Comte also believed that a Republican form of government was the best suited to realize the goals of his positive system. "By consecrating all human forces of whatever kind to the general service of the community," he claimed, "republicanism recognizes the doctrine of subordinating politics to morals." Republicanism was an ideology imbued with a moral sentiment, Comte believed, making it coterminous with the tenets of Positivism and its conception of morality. "The direct tendency, then, of the French Republic is to sanction the fundamental principle of Positivism, the preponderance, namely, of Feeling over Intellect and Activity. Starting from this point, public opinion will soon be convinced that the work of organizing society on republican principles is one which can only be performed by the new philosophy."³²¹ Positivism was, therefore, understood to be a variant of Republican thinking, sharing the same principles and ideals but offering a more inclusive and moderate policy than Republicanism had hitherto.

³²⁰ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, 37-38.

³²¹ Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 75.

The commonalities between the two strains of political thought did not, however, extend to the Jacobins. Indeed, the most dangerous obstacle to Comte's envisioned social regeneration was posed by the intransigence of radicals, those he deemed "professors of the guillotine." By persistently relying upon revolutionary tactics to bring about social and political change, Jacobins and other extremists effectively retarded progress and forced order to take on a reactionary form. "The only effect really produced by this party of disorder," Comte claimed, "is to serve as a bugbear for the benefit of the retrograde party, who thus obtains official support from the middle class, in a way which is quite contrary to all the principles and habits of that class."³²² His examples were drawn from the struggles of 1848, in which the specter of radical socialism after the June Days led to the formation of the conservative Party of Moral Order.

In addition to jeopardizing progress, radicals were also accused of putting their faith in "metaphysical utopias," which they sought to institute through violent and undemocratic means. Positivism, Comte stressed, revealed the futility of these "political chimeras" and directed action away from such utopian notions.³²³ In emphasizing the sociological components of Comtean thought, the positivist Emile Littré believed that a conception of the "sociologically impossible" could be formed, replacing utopian and metaphysical schemes with rational and empirical speculation. A practical approach to social issues could, therefore, be achieved, encouraging rational and moderate ends.³²⁴ "The legitimate republic, if we understand it to be the better arrangement of social forces," Littré claimed, "will come forth only through experience. In other words, through

³²² Ibid., 79-80.

³²³ Ibid., 126.

³²⁴ John Eros, "The Positivist Generation of French Republicanism," 256.

a gradual perfecting of what exists with the aid of reflection by political leaders and the suggestions of sociology."³²⁵ By stressing the relation between the principles of Positivism and the establishment of a democratic Republic in France, Littré offered the germ of a new Republican attitude which was moderate and not strictly subjugated to ideological precepts.

Littré's support for a Republican form of government was not necessarily an outcome of his dedication to the dictates of Comtean Positivism. Coming from a Parisian family committed to Republicanism during and after the French Revolution, the future scholar and philosopher had been inculcated with a respect for the democratic and enlightened values of Republican thought at a young age. A medical student and journalist who became dedicated to Positivism in the early 1840s after reading Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*, Littré worked closely with Comte during the July Monarchy in promoting scientific knowledge and philosophical positivism. Through these frequent collaborations, he came to believe in the ineluctable advance of progress which Comte endorsed, forming a conception of the sciences as enlightened truths capable of offering solutions to the pressing social problems of his age. "Among the men of today," Littré claimed, "we are moving towards a propagation of enlightenment attained by the works of science, and through this propagation, a corresponding improvement in social relations."³²⁶ His realistic and practical thinking presented a marked contrast to the often mystical and spiritual outlook of his master. "When a scientific course has been embarked upon," Littré wrote, "the result no longer depends on

³²⁵ Littré, *Conservation Révolution Positivisme*, 236.

³²⁶ Emile Littré, *Du devoir de l'homme envers lui-même et envers ses semblables* (Paris: Loge la Clémentine Amité, 1906), 24.

our will or even upon us. It depends on reality, and this reality might necessarily contradict the preconceived opinion held at the outset."³²⁷

In adopting Comte's analysis of order and progress and the need for new social principles, Littré eschewed the Romantic notions popular during the 1840s and rejected utopian schemes guided by rigid ideology. A dedicated Republican, he was nonetheless dismayed by Republicanism's cult of violence and uncompromising desire for immediate change. His staunch Republican views even became a source of conflict with his intellectual mentor after 1851, when Comte rallied to the Bonapartist cause. During the Second Republic, both Comte and Littré had believed that the time was ripe to initiate a program which would bring the eventual positivist state to fruition and placed their support behind the revolution. The overthrow of the Orléanist regime in February 1848 comported with Comte's belief in the transformative force of history, serving as the decisive moment in which the retrograde order was deposed and replaced by a more progressive and modern regime. To spread the doctrine of Positivism, they set up a *Société positive* in Paris to play an instrumental role in educating the public and providing the preconditions for the spiritual reorganization of society.³²⁸ "Things are rapidly maturing to make way for a new spiritual power which will restore moral and intellectual unity," Littré wrote with optimism during the Second Republic.³²⁹ It was an optimism which was to be short-lived.

The violence of the June Days, the election of Louis Napoleon, and the formation of the Party of Moral Order quashed Littré's confidence. Comte's subsequent support for

³²⁷ Littré, *Paroles de philosophie positive*, 41.

³²⁸ Aquarone, *The Life and Works of Émile Littré*, 35-36.

³²⁹ Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, 30.

Bonapartism and turn toward more spiritual matters after the coup led Littré to break irrevocably with his mentor, for Comte's increasing support for authoritarianism clashed with Littré's own Republican values. As the resulting schism between the two philosophers broadened, Littré began criticizing various aspects of Comte's philosophy, accusing it of being "subjective" and groundless with regard to its overtly religious sentiments and failing to recognize a free and democratic society in its social outlook.³³⁰ The break with his mentor and with the "orthodox" Positivists led by Pierre Laffitte after the master's death in 1857 did not entail a total rejection of positivist principles. Littré remained committed to the general tenets of Positivism—a strong belief in progress and morality, the necessity of a gradual societal transformation, and the vital need of spiritual reorganization—until his death in 1881. From 1852 onward, however, Littré sought to promote a program which synthesized Positivism with his Republican principles, stressing an ethical and rationalist philosophy which fostered the advancement of the individual and democracy while condemning violence and utopian schemes.³³¹ More so than Comte, Littré's philosophical and political thinking came to provide a comprehensive framework through which the creed of Positivism could be successfully joined with Republican ideology.

Littré's brand of moderate Republicanism and his denunciation of the "blood drenched fury"³³² of radical Jacobinism signaled a rethinking of Republican ideology after the embarrassing failure of the Second Republic. This reappraisal was, however, by no means exclusive to Littré alone, for numerous Republicans had begun to reconsider

³³⁰ Emile Littré, *Comte et la Philosophie Positive*, 3rd Ed. (Paris: Bureaux de la philosophie Positive, 1877), 588, 659; Aquarone, *The Life and Works of Émile Littré*, 34.

³³¹ Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, 70.

³³² Littré, *Conservation Révolution Positivisme*, 315.

their objectives and principles. The task was not easy. The Republican Party was driven underground as Napoleon III clamped down on the reins of political power, breaking up popular clubs and associations while imposing a rigid censorship on all oppositional newspapers critical of the new imperial regime. Many prominent Republicans of the Second Republic, such as Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanc, and Edgar Quinet, went into exile to avoid persecution, scattering the movement and stripping it of effective leadership.³³³ Salons, such as those held regularly by the socialites Daniel Stern and Juliette Adam, offered a small group of Republican elites the chance for continued dialogue during this period of despair, but real political action remained impossible.³³⁴

Writing from exile, the poet Victor Hugo offered strong words of encouragement to his fellow Republican compatriots in his scathing attack against Napoleon III, *Napoleon le petit*. "You do not see what all this chimera is!" he stated. "You do not see that the 2nd of December is only an immense delusion, a pause, a time of rest, a sort of curtain behind which God, the marvelous machinist, is preparing and constructing the last act, the supreme and triumphal act of the French revolution!"³³⁵ Eugène Pelletan, a journalist who had greeted the Second Republic with enthusiasm in 1848, obliged Republicans both at home and abroad to remain true to their beliefs and principles, claiming "resignation, that is to say immobility, can only be the virtue of the lamb dragged to the slaughterhouse."³³⁶ Despite such injunctions, the mood of Republicans during the early 1850s remained bleak. Refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the

³³³ Pamela M. Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France, 1814-1871* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 243.

³³⁴ Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, 207.

³³⁵ Hugo, *Napoleon the Little*, 307.

³³⁶ Eugène Pelletan, *Le Monde Marche: Lettres à Lamartine* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1857), 20.

Second Empire, Republicans used abstention from politics as a show of opposition to the regime. Taking the required oath of allegiance to the empire, a precondition for participation in politics, would, as Louis Blanc believed, be "suicide" for the Republican cause.³³⁷ Thus, despite urgings such as Pelletan's to remain an active force within French political life, Republicanism became quiescent, shut out of politics, and relegated to small circles of intellectuals and conspirators.

Political inactivity did not signify complete stagnation. Nor did it entail acquiescence to the detested imperial regime. The 1850s was a period of reflection and reconsideration for Republican elites, prompting a rethinking of the Republican project based upon the failures and tribulations of the Second Republic and the desire to harmonize Republican objectives with the moderate and liberal values of the bourgeoisie. During the 1840s, Republicans had supported notions of populism and worked to gain voting rights for the proletariat, peasants, and petit bourgeoisie. Many of these sentiments had a logical corollary with the ideals of Romanticism, an intellectual movement interested in folklore and rural culture and which venerated the peasant as the true spirit of a national France. Ideas concerning collective life and nationalism wove themselves into Republican ideology, stressing the need for a democratic and social Republic over the oligarchic *juste-milieu* of the July Monarchy.³³⁸ With the advent of the Second Republic, however, universal manhood suffrage had been achieved and was subsequently maintained by the Second Empire after 1852. The political realities of France had, therefore, changed since the 1840s, leading Republicans to reformulate their objectives.

³³⁷ Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France*, 247.

³³⁸ Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852*, trans., Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10-13.

The “social question” of the 1840s was a subject of particular importance. Under the Second Republic, Republicans had espoused a radical and populist program which set out to amend class relations and bring forth a social-democratic regime. Contrary to Republican objectives, the Second Republic had quickly divided along class lines, with the bourgeoisie and peasantry ultimately throwing their support behind the authoritarian policies of Napoleon III. With the hope of eliminating a point of “unnecessary” division, Republican elites under the Second Empire sought to marginalize the social question while simultaneously promoting a liberal and democratic program supportive of bourgeois interests and values. Class questions were not imperative to founding the Republic, moderates argued, and had to be abandoned for the sake of unity.³³⁹ Democracy, rather than explicit social equality, became the focus of moderate thinking, thus purging Republican ideology of the socialist elements which horrified property owners and capitalists. Vague conceptions of social egalitarianism were occasionally equated with democratic institutions, such as Étienne Vacherot’s claim that social classes would “disappear” within a truly “democratic” society.³⁴⁰ Yet on the whole, the efforts of moderates served to render the social question otiose and assuage bourgeois fears of the “red” republic.

If a reassessment of Republican goals was in order, so too was the subject of specific means to achieve them. The insurrection of the June Days had raised serious doubts in the minds of the bourgeoisie and notables as to the capability of Republican government and shook up fundamental Republican beliefs as well. Littré and Comte, in condemning radical Jacobinism, highlighted the dilemma Republicans faced: the

³³⁹ Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic*, 41-44.

³⁴⁰ Étienne Vacherot, *La Démocratie* (Paris: Chamerot, 1860), 30.

revolutionary ideology of Republicanism, born from the experiences of 1792 and the Convention of the 1792-95, was an obstacle to creating a mass movement. Thus, until the revolutionary element was purged from ideological constructs, the Republican cause would remain relegated to a limited group of followers. As Comte had stressed, the ideals of 1789 had to be upheld in working towards order and progress while the revolutionary tradition of Republican mythology had to be abandoned.

By the early 1860s, such a view was becoming widespread among Republican circles demanding a more moderate policy akin to that of positivist thinking. In 1865, Edgard Quinet, writing from exile in Switzerland, addressed the question of method in his book *La Révolution*. Condemning Jacobin terrorism and the evident illiberal elements of Republican political culture, Quinet accused those harboring radical aspirations of dooming the Republic in France to repeated failures. The Republic had been won in February 1848 only to be undermined by the populist extremism of the June Days, as conservative forces coalesced under Louis Napoleon to restore a repressive and authoritarian regime. Quinet insisted that no progress toward a Republican form of government could be made in France until radical Jacobinism was purged from the ideological outlook of the movement.³⁴¹ Under this analysis, men like Blanqui, who depicted themselves as true upholders of the Republican revolutionary tradition, were, henceforth, deemed enemies of the Republican cause.

In defending Quinet's book, the young lawyer Jules Ferry further articulated the need for moderate means over revolutionary objectives. Jacobinism was, Ferry charged, a

³⁴¹ François Furet, "Jules Ferry et l'histoire de la Révolution Française: la Polémique autour de livre d'Edgar Quinet, 1865-1866," in François Furet, ed., *Jules Ferry: Fondateur de la République* (Paris: Éditions de L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences sociales, 1985), 15-16.

"peril" which symbolized dictatorship as much as Bonapartism did. "The dictator places himself in that monstrous and puerile dream of a society regenerated by the scaffold," he continued, "an unbelievable mélange of atrocities and naiveté . . . of didactic, absurd and sanguinary utopias which eternally remain attached to the names of Saint-Just and Robespierre."³⁴² Further censure of revolutionary Republicanism soon came from other critics as well. "That doctrine which states that the end justifies the means, if favorable in appearance, is disastrous," warned Jules Simon. "Its inevitable effect would be to destroy public order and unleash the anarchy of will."³⁴³ Eugène Pelletan similarly condemned Jacobinism as a "ghastly doctrine" which committed egregious violations against liberty by its Machiavellian perspective.³⁴⁴ The preeminent Republican Emile Ollivier, soon to be the leader of the parliamentary opposition under the Second Empire, rejected the conception of Hegelian struggle endemic to extremist ideologies. "It is necessary to render the republican principle conservative in that it is progressive and distinguished from its purely revolutionary element," he wrote in 1857. "In other words, it is impermissible to consider it in terms of thesis and antithesis which results in the conflict of synthesis. All antimonies which arise must be resolved Neither one nor the other can be removed from it since they are equally true. They are mixed up in a much vaster doctrine."³⁴⁵ The conflicting components within dialectical thinking, he argued, were not necessarily antagonistic and could be placed within a single doctrine which worked harmoniously rather than violently. "What is needed for government in France," summed up the fiery Gambetta, a young and ambitious Republican lawyer who never concealed

³⁴² François Furet, "Jules Ferry et l'histoire de la Révolution Française," 17, 19.

³⁴³ Jules Simon, *Le Devoir* (Paris: Hachette, 1863), 362.

³⁴⁴ Eugène Pelletan, *Heures de Travail* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1852), 1:280.

³⁴⁵ Emile Ollivier, *Journal*, 1:274-75.

his admiration for Auguste Comte or Positivism, "is violence in speech and moderation in action."³⁴⁶

Reacting against the brutal and irrational tactics of revolutionary Jacobins, moderate Republicans endorsed the use of reason in structuring practical policies. "I am convinced that reason alone must indicate the possibilities of politics, religion, and art," claimed Ollivier. "I no longer consider sentiment a compass which designates direction . . . like an intermediary through which the facts of reason are communicated to the ignorant and feeble-spirited."³⁴⁷ In 1855, the journal *L'Avenir*, a periodical focused on literary and philosophical topics which attracted a sizeable Republican audience, proclaimed its dedication to the rationalist spirit, declaring "we believe in the sovereignty of reason and its omnipotence."³⁴⁸ Charles Dupont-White, a Republican who sympathized with liberalism's respect for the rule of law, declared his abhorrence for revolutionary government, writing "the essence of the state is to be the power of reason expressed through law, and not that of man perverted by fantasy."³⁴⁹

By emphasizing reason and condemning revolutionary aspirations, moderate Republicans were consciously affirming their respect for legal precedent over mob violence. Yet in order to ground such arguments within a logical and coherent framework, the nature of law had to be firmly established outside of arbitrary will or metaphysical speculation. In accordance with the principles of rationalism, the conservative republican and former professor of philosophy at the *École Normale*

³⁴⁶ Deschanel, *Gambetta*, 16.

³⁴⁷ Ollivier, *Journal*, 1:182.

³⁴⁸ *L'Avenir* (6 May 1855), quoted in Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, 135.

³⁴⁹ Charles Dupont-White, *L'individu et l'État* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1857), vii.

Supérieure, Jules Simon, asserted that directives must be established under the truth of scientific analysis. "In making them dependent on the amelioration of scientific progress," he claimed, "we give to them the single immutability of which they are susceptible." Natural principles could, in Simon's opinion, be devised through rational and scientific investigation, establishing axiomatic and universal truths capable of structuring secular society and guiding human action. The moral validity of such laws would be unquestionable, since science sought "to make laws better or render them useless."³⁵⁰

"To construct a democratic edifice which does not fall into forms of either demagoguery, anarchy, tyranny, or despotism," claimed the Republican philosopher Jules Barni in 1868, "we must build upon moral ground."³⁵¹ Establishing democratic institutions, in the view of these new republicans, was dependent upon the development of a secular morality, one outside the realm of theological or metaphysical rationale but recognizing human freedom and resting on reason and conscience.³⁵² Science offered this alternative in its very praxis, acknowledging the existence of universal laws which were irrefutable and based upon empirical evidence. "There is no sensible mind," argued the philosopher and political thinker Étienne Vacherot, "which doubts that morality is a veritable science founded on facts and susceptible to verification and observation."³⁵³ The traditional precepts of Christian dogma, which had hitherto sanctioned the validity of moral principles, could neither comport with the democratic trend of modern society nor

³⁵⁰ Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:437.

³⁵¹ Jules Barni, *La Morale dans la démocratie*, 2nd Ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1885), 13.

³⁵² Phyllis Stock-Morton, *Moral Education for a Secular Society: The Development of Morale Laïque in Nineteenth Century France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 3-4.

³⁵³ Vacherot, *La Démocratie*, 66.

legitimately sanction moral or legal imperatives. "Humility, confidence, obedience, imposed faith," Jules Simon charged, "all of these phantoms from an abolished world cannot be brought back nor exist without folly in the milieu of our modern world, governed by reason and politics, and of which the first and last word is the sovereignty of the people."³⁵⁴ Declaring that "Catholicism and despotism are brothers," Vacherot similarly asserted that a religion preaching submission and docility contradicted true liberty and could not, therefore, serve the development of free and democratic institutions. "I believe," he averred, "that science and philosophy should one day suffice for humanity."³⁵⁵ By claiming that morality was secular and devised scientifically, Republican theorists saw moral law as being construed within fixed principles and functioning as "the solid and eternal entity within [the] legislation" of a democratic society.³⁵⁶ "That which is certain cannot be defined by metaphysics," proclaimed Ernest Picard; "the constitutional right which leads a people to its liberties is a concrete fact, incontestable, and something which we cannot deny."³⁵⁷

Republicans' analysis of autonomous law and secular morality made apparent the integral value of scientific reasoning in conceptions of liberty and political action, equating respect for law, rationalism, and freedom with science and morality. "Science and the state," Simon urged, "must attach themselves in common accord to promulgate [universal laws] with clarity and maintain them firmly Neither skepticism nor

³⁵⁴ Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:428.

³⁵⁵ Vacherot, *La Démocratie*, xxvii, 55.

³⁵⁶ Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:438.

³⁵⁷ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (Paris: L'Administration du Moniteur Universel, 1870), 3:297.

revolutions can destroy them."³⁵⁸ The rejection of metaphysical speculation and the adoption of a more rationalist approach to social and political issues indicated a growing consensus among moderate Republicans to impart a spirit of scientific realism to their thinking. "Instead of vague propositions," declared Gambetta, ". . . a scientific spirit should be introduced into government We need a method and a system."³⁵⁹

Addressing the Corps législatif in 1870, Emile Ollivier claimed unequivocally, "Politics is not, any more than philosophy, an abstract science in which one proceeds a priori; politics, just as and even more than philosophy, is an experimental science."³⁶⁰

Ollivier's belief in the "experimental" nature of politics was the product of his own political experiences during the Second Republic and Second Empire. As an official in Marseilles during 1848, Ollivier had discovered that his moderate policies were unsatisfactory to both the wary bourgeoisie and the wild Jacobins in his district. Too radical for conservatives yet too conservative for the radicals, he found political office a frustrating experience in time of turmoil. In 1849, fatigued and confounded, he resigned from his post to take up the practice of law. "I do not know what to believe in once and for all," he wrote in 1852: "an eternal tempest agitates my thoughts. Catholicism, philosophy, socialism, now united, now hostile, contend and clash in my spirit, which is capable of sensing the unity between them and yet unable to formulate it in precise terms."³⁶¹ As he reflected on these contentions over the course of the next few years, Ollivier came to devise new ideas which quieted the storm in his mind and vindicated his beliefs in moderate political action.

³⁵⁸ Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:438.

³⁵⁹ Eros, "The Positivist Generation of French Republicanism," 261.

³⁶⁰ Quoted in Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 173.

³⁶¹ Ollivier, *Journal*, 1:110.

In grappling with the issue of political principles, Ollivier concluded that a divide existed between political philosophy and practical politics. Political thinkers who clung to rigid ideological platforms or utopian schemes always failed to deal with the practical matters of politics at hand. Statesmanship, in his opinion, required a certain flexibility, and thus, Ollivier vowed never to be “chained by tradition.”³⁶² Although a confirmed Republican, his belief in practical policies led him to reject working directly toward the founding of a Republican government in France. For him, the prerequisite of the Republic was liberty, and rather than sanction revolutionary change, Republicans ought to work toward the creation of democratic institutions under the Second Empire. “I want before all, in the company of no matter whom,” he declared, “liberty without epithets, neither sober nor true liberty, but simply liberty! The Republic will follow from it sooner or later as a necessary consequence, for it is the maximum of liberty. Desiring to obtain it without having previously obtained the recognition of all the rights and liberties appears to me as unreasonable as attempting to prove a person’s error who claims that two plus two equals five before having first explained and made clear the rules of addition.”³⁶³ Liberty was the desired end which most Republicans sought, and it was to this end that Republicans had to work, abandoning conceptions of particular forms of government or strict theoretical principles.

In asseverating his brand of moderate Republicanism, Ollivier sought “to make the republican principle as conservative as it is progressive and to remove from it its purely revolutionary element.”³⁶⁴ Effecting democratic change within the authoritarian

³⁶² Quoted in Zeldin, *Emile Ollivier*, 36.

³⁶³ Ollivier, *Journal*, 1:439.

³⁶⁴ Quoted in Zeldin, *Emile Ollivier*, 38.

Second Empire required, however, participation in government, entailing an end to the policy of abstention upheld by Republicans during the early 1850s. “The only hope we ought to have,” Ollivier wrote, “is that [the Emperor] will grant liberty of his own accord.”³⁶⁵ If such was not the case, then only revolutionary methods would suffice in establishing a democratic regime, an alternative which Ollivier and many of his cohorts did not care to consider. Abstaining from politics was not, however, yielding any productive gains for the Republicans, and Ollivier believed it was now time to undertake a new approach. Inveterate *quarante-huitards* deemed Ollivier a traitor to the cause and accused him of collaborating with the enemy as he encouraged a small number of Republicans to run for election to the Corps législatif in 1857. Gaining support from opposition journalists, he was able to defeat the imperial candidate in Paris and assume a leadership role within the small faction of Republicans who took the oath of allegiance to the empire and ended the self-imposed exclusion of the Republican Party from the imperial government.

“Imagine how we, the *abstentionnistes*, judged Emile Ollivier,” charged Juliette Adam in her memoirs: “He was a traitor.”³⁶⁶ “The Empire is incapable of giving us *any* liberties,” added Eugène Pelletan. “Ollivier proceeds against the grain [*à rebours*].”³⁶⁷ “When one puts oneself above parties,” claimed Ollivier in his own defense, “is it not natural that the parties should throw him out? I accept the consequences of this position. To be a politician, a deputy, is not an aim in itself for me but only a means, the means of

³⁶⁵ Ollivier, *Journal*, 1:437

³⁶⁶ Adam, *Mes sentiments et nos idées*, 45.

³⁶⁷ Adam, *Mes premières armes*, 289.

serving my convictions.”³⁶⁸ Despite the vehement criticisms and recriminations slung back and forth, the election of *Les Cinq*—as the five deputies became known—to the Corps législatif in 1857 gave new life to the Republican movement. The renunciation of revolutionary tactics made participating in the government essential if Republicans intended to achieve their political goals. The issue was no longer attempting to fight the government from outside but rather seeking to reform it from within.³⁶⁹

Although small in number, the new Republican opposition within the Corps législatif gave the imperial government cause for alarm. In a letter to the ministry of the interior, Napoleon III expressed his concerns about the recent Republican victories, claiming it was necessary to “reflect seriously” on the recent turn in public opinion. Bonapartists fearful that serious reflection could mean appeasing the five Republicans in the Corps législatif warned against such measures in their official reports to the emperor. “The remedy of the evils,” wrote the prefect of Paris, the imperious Baron Georges Haussmann, “does not appear to me to be the increase of liberty which would be one more weapon in hostile hands. We have seen the effects of the methods of gentleness; kindness is taken for fear by men who respect nothing but force.”³⁷⁰

The anxieties generated by the election of 1857 were given substance a few months later when Italian nationalists carried out an assassination attempt on the imperial family as their carriage pulled up before the Paris opera house on the evening of 14 January 1858. The three bombs launched by the assassins injured members of the

³⁶⁸ Quoted in Zeldin, *Emile Ollivier*, 66.

³⁶⁹ Price, *The French Second Empire*, 347-49; Judith F. Stone, *Sons of the Revolution: Radical Democrats in France, 1862-1914* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 58.

³⁷⁰ Quoted in Theodore Zeldin, *The Political System of Napoleon III* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 76.

imperial escort, but Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie emerged unscathed from the attack. When questioned by the authorities, the leader of the attempt, an Italian republican named Felice Orsini, claimed he desired to kill the enemy of Italian freedom who had destroyed the Roman Republic in 1849 and restored the pope to power. Although Orsini's confession revealed his motives were rooted in a nationalist fervor for his native Italy and had no connection to French Republican circles, the government quickly used the affair to clamp down on all perceived forms of dangerous political opposition within the country. The implementation of the Law of General Security later that year allowed for arrest and detention upon the merest suspicion of subversion. Republican organizations became a particular target of the imperial police, who broke up meetings and apprehend suspects indiscriminately.³⁷¹

In spite of attempts by the government to crack down on the mounting Republican movement, gains in the following election of 1863 revealed the futility of such efforts. By the early 1860s, economic decline and dissatisfaction with the empire's inept foreign policy had bred cynicism not only in Republican circles, but in the liberal bourgeois and industrial classes as well. Capitalizing on the general mood of discontent, Republicans actively encouraged the opposition to put forward Republican candidates in the coming elections. The veteran Republican and *quarante-huitard* Antoine Garnier-Pagès undertook a whistle-stop campaign in the spring of 1863, visiting more than sixty towns and stressing the importance of Republicans becoming an active force in the Corps législatif. Yet it was not only Republicans who came to support Republican candidates; the appeal of moderate Republicanism for Liberal and bourgeois voters was also

³⁷¹ Bresler, *Napoleon III*, 295; Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France*, 248-49.

growing. Writing of 1860 in her memoirs, Juliette Adam claimed that “the new year had its bright spots [*éclaircies*] and its rebirths; the love of liberty, while still timid, fortified itself in the upper classes In all the parties of opposition, the elite of intelligence placed itself at the service of liberal ideas and attacked personal power.”³⁷² The Republican victories of 1863, therefore, cut across both class and ideological lines. By insisting upon parliamentary rather than revolutionary resistance, Republicans were able to place themselves at the head of an opposition movement within the Corps législatif designated as the *Union libérale*, an electoral front which advocated a “fusionist” policy of drawing all reformist elements into a common cause against the authoritarian imperial regime.³⁷³

In addition to the solidarity expressed by the new opposition front, moderates found support within the government from the more liberal thinking Bonapartists, most notably the emperor’s half-brother, the Duc de Morny. “He understands the situation wonderfully,” claimed Ollivier while discussing Morny, “and I am convinced that he is the most remarkable political figure of the Empire, with a sagacity and forward-looking intelligence.”³⁷⁴ Hoping to sidestep the more drastic measures of adopting a parliamentary system or undertaking constitutional reform, Morny believed that the growing opposition could be assimilated with the imperial government if liberal reforms were carried out effectively. He cultivated a close relationship with Ollivier after his electoral victory in 1857, believing that the deputy’s brand of moderate Republicanism

³⁷² Adam, *Mes premières armes*, 225-26.

³⁷³ Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France*, 249; Louis Girard, “Jules Ferry et la génération des républicains du Second Empire,” in *Jules Ferry: Fondateur de la République*, 53; Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 301.

³⁷⁴ Ollivier, *Journal*, 2:90.

could be harmonized with his own progressive and liberal principles, especially on the issue of extending greater political liberties to the national legislature. Although both men agreed that the conservative majority within the empire was not yet prepared to accept a policy of liberalization, Morny's public commitment to the project offered hope to the opposition in their efforts to reform the government from within.³⁷⁵ Presiding over the Corps législatif during the opening session of 1863, Morny encouraged the deputies to continue with their policy of moderate opposition, for it alone would lead to the establishment of true liberty within the empire. "In France, the struggle between the great public powers produced revolutions," he claimed, "but they never produced, in a definitive form, a durable liberty. Believe me, messieurs, I say it to you with a patriotic conviction, liberty can only be established peacefully, by the sincere accord between a liberal sovereign and a moderate assembly."³⁷⁶

Taking their seats in the Corps législatif, Republicans sought to use the body as a forum for articulating their new vision of the Republic and addressing the many egregious abuses of power practiced by the Second Empire. One of the most galling violations of liberty brought under reproach by the opposition deputies was the empire's attempt to stifle free thought through its censorship policies. "Freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom to write and publish," claimed Charles Renouvier, "are among the most important liberties."³⁷⁷ Unlike the radicals banding together under the platform of *pensée libre* who equated freedom of thought with the abolition of religious institutions, moderate Republicans adopted a more practical policy which accorded with

³⁷⁵ Williams, *Gaslight and Shadows*, 57; Zeldin, *Emile Ollivier*, 74-75.

³⁷⁶ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1864), 1:3.

³⁷⁷ Quoted in Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 245.

their desire for true democracy and liberty. "The first of all liberties," declared Jules Simon, "the most simple, the source of all others . . . is the freedom of thought."³⁷⁸

As a professor of philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure during the 1840s, Simon had already distinguished himself as a preeminent intellectual figure in France by the end of the July Monarchy. In 1852, however, he was removed from his teaching position as part of the general purge carried out in academia by the Second Empire. Other future Republican luminaries shared a similar fate, including Étienne Vacherot, whose critique of Christianity in his *Histoire de l'école d'Alexandrine* as atavistic and anti-progressive had led to his dismissal. Punished for the sake of his political principles, Simon held nothing but contempt for the empire and vehemently criticized the stifling censorship policies of the imperial regime. Taking his cause into the political arena, he execrated the government before the Corps législatif in 1864, declaring, "when one speaks of the inquisition, it always seems to be the inquisition which burned men at the stake; at present, as you know, the inquisition only burns books."³⁷⁹

When not voicing criticisms against the government from inside the legislative assembly, Simon used his pen to attack political extremists within the Republican camp. The Jacobin cult of revolutionary government conflicted wholly with the values of liberty and freedom he worked to promote. A passionate defender of intellectual liberty, Simon disdained groups like the Blanquists and the Free Thought Movement, both of which attacked established religion. In his critique, he illuminated the self-evident contradictions held by such militant groups, claiming, "freedom of religion is freedom of

³⁷⁸ Jules Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:387.

³⁷⁹ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1864), 3:185.

thought; this consequence is in its very principle."³⁸⁰ As Simon successfully demonstrated, the hostility toward the Church expressed by radicals in the name of intellectual freedom evinced a fundamental hypocrisy in their thinking. Ultramontane Catholics who condemned atheists and materialists in the name of the Church and religious doctrine were, however, equally as culpable as their radical opponents in his eyes. "The freedom to believe is fulfilled," he assessed, "only when it is understood that there is also the freedom not to believe."³⁸¹ The reconciliation of these two warring camps, he posited, could only be achieved through the establishment of a secular society [*société laïque*] in which scholarly and intellectual discourse was promoted through public debate and rational argument. "We live, think, and breath in a secular society," he declared before the Corps législatif. "The spirit of Descartes and of great thinkers came upon us in plain consequence. Thought is emancipated, and all—from the great philosophers to their most vehement critics—know that if there is an incontestable right, henceforth, it is the right to think and pass proper judgment on all things, the right of professing only that which one believes."³⁸² While the notion of a secular society derived from the principles of Republican anticlericalism, it did not condone repression in the name of the general will, a salient feature of radical thinking. The principles of liberty assured the right to believe, and political institutions could not subjugate individual freedom to ideological precepts. This rationalist and, above all, democratic approach was expressed by Emile Ollivier in 1859, when he stated, "Although dogmatically I find Catholicism absurd, I will never attack it. That is the work of theologians Politics

³⁸⁰ Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:381.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2:379.

³⁸² *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1864), 3:186.

must respect [religion]; never attack it, but only restrain it and subordinate it to liberty."³⁸³

Although willing to tolerate dogmatic religion under the principle of freedom of thought, science and material progress remained the central theme within Republican discourse. "Let us create, or at least develop . . . minds and souls through education, through science and philosophy," claimed Vacherot, ". . . and then let us not fear to leave them alone face to face with truth."³⁸⁴ "In modern society," Simon contended, "freedom of thought must be absolute It is necessary that the scientific community, to be consistent, guard its liberty and sovereignty; it is science which first founded [the principle of intellectual freedom], and it also restores, ameliorates, and carries it along to its ultimate consequences. The time of immobility is no more: the world belongs to, without return, reason, liberty, and progress."³⁸⁵

The emphasis placed upon progress by moderates was clearly distinct from the notion of radical and violent progress upheld by Jacobins. Whereas militants associated progress with the destruction of the Church as a social force, moderates focused on themes of continuity and gradual development. "Are the needs of humanity the same in all ages?" Simon rhetorically asked. "No; they develop and transform It is essential to contemplate the means of amelioration. It is necessary to put them to the test, in that order and progress make their way without interruption [*secousse*] and groping, but with maturity and confidence."³⁸⁶ For Eugène Pelletan, man was "an historical being

³⁸³ Ollivier, *Journal*, 1:405.

³⁸⁴ Quoted in Stock-Morton, *Moral Education for a Secular Society*, 48.

³⁸⁵ Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:434.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:436.

continually changing throughout progress," a conception further stressing the constant and steady quality of progressive transformation.³⁸⁷

Progress was also linked to the ambitions and dynamism of the middle class, especially with regard to industrialism which, according to Pelletan, signified the "bourgeoisie reduced to its truest expression."³⁸⁸ In defining notions of social and material progress, Republican elites often emphasized the vigorous ingenuity and resourcefulness exemplified by the bourgeoisie, whose mores and outlooks encouraged education, economic growth, and individual initiative. They stood firmly between the forces of tyrannical authoritarianism on one hand and complete social disintegration on the other. In the words of one Republican pamphleteer, the bourgeoisie represented "the only solid ground on which the future and the past may meet [It] is both that superior status towards which all popular ambitions reach and the milieu in which the aristocracy becomes purified."³⁸⁹ In contrast to bourgeois sensibilities, the Second Empire nurtured itself on aristocratic pretense, encouraging materialism and errant prodigality throughout France. Rather than inspiring faith in the abilities of man and progress, the growth of wealth and industry under the empire had, as Pelletan claimed, created a "despotism of luxury."³⁹⁰

Arriving in Paris from Poitiers in the early 1830s, Pelletan established a reputation as a forceful journalist with close ties to Republican circles. He became acquainted with many of the cultural elites of his generation, including Victor Hugo and

³⁸⁷ Pelletan, *Heures de Travail*, 1:81-82.

³⁸⁸ Pelletan, *Le Monde Marche*, 116.

³⁸⁹ Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic*, 30-31.

³⁹⁰ Eugène Pelletan, *La nouvelle Babylone* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1863), 79-84.

the novelist George Sand, who affectionately referred to him as her "Pelican,"³⁹¹ and worked with the Republican poet Alphonse de Lamartine on his newspaper *Démocratie pacifique*. A romantic with a deep sense of spirituality, he believed that the overthrow of the July Monarchy in 1848 possessed a certain religious significance. Indeed, in the first frenzied days of the revolution, it appeared to him that "God was bowing down to the cradle of the infant Republic."³⁹² The failure of the Second Republic convinced Pelletan, however, that the goals of 1789 had yet to be consummated. The task, he believed, now fell to his own generation coming of age under the Second Empire.³⁹³ "The Revolution . . . is our soul, our flesh, our nature."³⁹⁴

For Pelletan, the Revolution stood for progress, both intellectually and materially, producing a conception of a "new humanity" which would embody the ideals of liberty and equality and order society accordingly.³⁹⁵ These virtues were to be found, correspondingly, within the emulous dynamism and economic prowess of the bourgeoisie. "Freedom is bourgeois by origin," he once remarked, while capitalism was "the true redeemer, mediator, and remunerator" of man, as it broke down rigid social hierarchies and engendered a sense of personal freedom.³⁹⁶ Human ingenuity, manifested most strikingly by the growth of capitalism, constituted the "historical phenomenon of progress," he claimed.³⁹⁷ In his praise for productivity and personal initiative, he saw

³⁹¹ Charles F. Dupêchez, ed., *Marie D'Agoult, George Sand: Corredpondance* (Paris: Bartillat, 2001), 154.

³⁹² Eugène Pelletan, *Histoire des trios journées de Février 1848* (Paris: Louis Colas, 1848), 170.

³⁹³ Pelletan, *Heures de Travail*, 1:226.

³⁹⁴ Quoted in Stone, *Sons of the Revolution*, 18.

³⁹⁵ Pelletan, *Heures de Travail*, 1:20.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:46, 287.

³⁹⁷ Pelletan, *Le Monde Marche*, 24.

society as "a vast factory in which matter . . . is constantly being elaborated and processed."³⁹⁸

This belief in society's dynamic principles led Pelletan to apotheosize the scope of industry in modern life. Industrialism was the lynchpin of the bourgeoisie, the class Pelletan believed most fit to govern society. Yet industrial development also cultivated man's intellectual faculties and produced a politically conscious worker who was capable of participating in political life as an active citizen.³⁹⁹ Thus, industrial and modern society was preparing the people for true liberty as they gained the moral, financial, and intellectual accoutrements with which to engage in politics and self-government. "Thanks to God and the progress of our times," Pelletan declared, "the people of today now only have faith in liberty and individual initiative."⁴⁰⁰ Pelletan's conviction that modernity and democracy went hand-in-hand was a popular theme among other Republican writers. "Do you not see," asked Victor Hugo, "that the old world had as a fatal fault, an old soul—tyranny, and that into the new world there is about to descend, necessarily, irresistibly, divinely, a young soul—liberty?"⁴⁰¹ "The principle of modern societies is the sovereignty of the people," stated Jules Simon; "the consequence of this principle is the participation of all in the legislative power by representation. This alone is the philosophy, of which politics is only a method."⁴⁰²

If modernity meant the growth of progress and the emergence of a democratic political culture, education, the hallmark of bourgeois culture, had a necessary role in

³⁹⁸ Pelletan, *Heures de Travail*, 2:141.

³⁹⁹ Pelletan, *Le Monde Marche*, 114-16.

⁴⁰⁰ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1864), 3:144.

⁴⁰¹ Hugo, *Napoleon the Little*, 301.

⁴⁰² Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:244.

developing it.⁴⁰³ "Ignorance, superstition, immorality, [and] poverty can make the exercise of popular rights vain or even dangerous," contended Vacherot.⁴⁰⁴ While universal suffrage accorded with the principles of a free society, Republicans had learned to be mistrustful of the masses during their experiences under the Second Republic. Prior to 1848, Republicans influenced by Romanticism had stressed the inherent virtue and reason of human nature when acting upon its own volition. Thus, once man's spirit had been liberated, it followed that he was naturally prepared to engage in political action, guided by his innate proclivity toward the good and just. The establishment of universal suffrage in 1848, however, had disillusioned many Republicans possessing Romantic conceptions regarding man's inherent abilities. Anti-democratic forces had been elected to the National Assembly in April followed by Louis Napoleon's sweeping electoral victory that winter. Reflecting back on the failures which had marked the Second Republic, Republicans under the Second Empire fervently stressed the strong relationship that existed between an educated civic sphere and a democratic society.⁴⁰⁵

Shunning the romantic influences of the *quarante-huitards*, moderate Republicans associated education and the development of the rational faculties with the production of a responsible and active citizenry. "As long as the political education of a people is not complete," Vacherot acutely noted, "universal suffrage remains impracticable and cannot be fully realized."⁴⁰⁶ "Political ambition is legitimate and salutary" contended Jules Barni; "We must not only allow but even encourage wise men to take part in public

⁴⁰³ Pelletan, *Le Monde Marche*, 204.

⁴⁰⁴ Vacherot, *La Démocratie*, vii.

⁴⁰⁵ Stock-Morton, *Moral Education for a Secular Society*, 51.

⁴⁰⁶ Vacherot, *La Démocratie*, 353.

affairs, provided of course that they are fit to do so.”⁴⁰⁷ Citizenship and the refinement of the intellectual faculties were, for Republicans, coterminous in their conception of a free, rational, and democratic society. The state elevated to its “supreme power,” Pelletan claimed, was the unity of its citizens “developing toward their greatest potential of intelligence and morality.”⁴⁰⁸

By encouraging the cultivation of a strong civic spirit which would lead the people to take a direct and active role in their political affairs, Republicans stood in stark opposition to the imperial Bonapartists, who stressed the necessity of a highly centralized government in combating the degenerative force of social revolution. Since the first days of the Second Empire, Bonapartists had maintained an incorrigible suspicion of local government. If not properly monitored by the authorities, the government feared, communes and municipal offices elected under universal suffrage could become a haven for dangerous radicals and enemies of the regime, especially in the larger urban areas where Republican clubs and associations had thrived during the Second Republic. Hoping to expunge political contentions from local public life, Bonapartists impinged upon the administrative and conciliar organs of the French communes in the name of public order and unity. The controls placed on municipal governments in both the capital and the provinces effectively curbed their administrative powers and subordinated them to the imperial ministry of the interior. Prefects, appointed by the state, wielded great political influence and authority at the local level, selecting mayors without the approval of the local population and manipulating universal suffrage during national elections by supporting state-sponsored “official candidates,” men who had curried favor with

⁴⁰⁷ Barni, *La Morale*, 124-25.

⁴⁰⁸ Pelletan, *La nouvelle Babylone*, 121.

imperial officials and who would faithfully carry out the policies of the government, even in the provinces furthest from Paris.⁴⁰⁹

In this restrictive political culture, the roles of civic councils, municipal officials, and local *fonctionnaires* were significantly marginalized in the communes. The independence and authority once enjoyed by representative councils and municipalities under the July Monarchy and Second Republic became eclipsed by the prerogative of the central government in Paris.⁴¹⁰ “In a country like France,” warned the Republican deputy Jules Favre in 1867, “nothing could be more dangerous than the detachment of its citizens from their proper affairs. We may not know what trial we are destined for, but we will surely undertake it with courage.”⁴¹¹ The authoritarian nature of the Second Empire symbolized, according to Republicans, a denial of the potential and moral fiber prevailing within the human spirit. Imperial officials, the public icons of despotism in Republican eyes, became an especially popular target in critiques of the empire during the 1860s. Accusing officials of apathy and incompetence in managing local affairs, such attacks revealed a growing disapproval with the government’s extensive bureaucracy as well as an uncertainty as to its effectiveness. “Distant despot, obeying the orders of another despot,” wrote Charles Renouvier, “the prefect either ignores the particular interests of the commune or overlooks them for political or personal reasons; . . . he is in no way entrusted with defending the great moral, intellectual, and material interests of those he

⁴⁰⁹ Louis Girard, *Les conseillers généraux en 1870* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 133; Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 40-42; Theodore Zeldin, *The Political System of Napoleon III*, 20-26.

⁴¹⁰ Félix Ponteil, *Les institutions de la France de 1814 à 1870* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 372-73.

⁴¹¹ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1867), 4:134.

administrators.”⁴¹² “Look at this well-organized administration,” averred Jules Simon, “where all the *fonctionnaires* depend so closely on each other and rely only on their supervisor without any responsibility to the public.”⁴¹³

In its embodiment of individuality, civic virtue and justice, the Republic exemplified a social and moral political culture distinct from the mediocrity and constraints of the Second Empire. “Rather than suffocate municipal freedoms under a system of administrative centralization,” Barni claimed, “the Republican state will favor their development.”⁴¹⁴ In defending municipal sovereignty, Republicans came to idealize the commune as the rudimentary locale of social and political life. “There is one thing that we all believe,” claimed Pelletan while addressing the Corps législatif in 1864: “it is that the commune exists by itself and in itself, and that in historical order, it existed prior to the state. It must have, therefore, a proper administration, I will not say outside the state, but rather alongside the state.”⁴¹⁵ Jules Simon extolled the unique nature of municipal life and collectivity fostered within the commune, claiming “the commune is a collective entity recognized by law but which ultimately derives from an essential nature. Political laws discover the commune but do not create it.”⁴¹⁶

The sovereignty of the commune was not solely legitimated by historical precedent and essence. It also served a practical function in the life of the citizen by creating a political identity and initiating the people into the culture of true democracy. “The commune is the primary school of governmental science,” proclaimed the

⁴¹² Quoted in Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 269.

⁴¹³ Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:276

⁴¹⁴ Jules Barni, *Manuel Républicain* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1872), 23.

⁴¹⁵ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1864), 3:142.

⁴¹⁶ Simon, *La Liberté*, 2:249.

Republican deputy Pierre-Joseph Magnin. “Attaining the power of administering their own commune will allow the citizens to comprehend the price they must attach to the public sphere . . . [for they] will take a more lively and ardent interest in the welfare of the locality and the village rather than in the great concerns of the state.”⁴¹⁷ At the level of the commune, democracy constituted a natural and living force within society, constructed upon a sense of shared community, mutual interest, and civic pride. In defending the independence of local government, Republicans confidently anticipated that the nation would reject the passive and acquiescent conception of citizenship fostered under the Second Empire and embrace the active and vigorous ethos compatible with modern society. By 1870, this new France visualized by the *jeune républicains* already appeared on the brink of realization. “It is not difficult to perceive,” Gambetta optimistically claimed, “that not only in the cities, but in the countryside as well, there is a political fermentation penetrating into the lower classes of the population, and that universal suffrage readily appears to them as the irresistible path to emancipation.”⁴¹⁸

The social, cultural, and moral values articulated by the theorists and politicians of the 1860s signaled the culmination of the *jeune républicain* movement under the Second Empire. In their respect for law and desire to promote progress, they condemned the militant revolutionary principles of the Jacobins, replacing them with a firm belief in the orderly progression toward democracy and confidence in the abilities of the individual. “I have . . . too much confidence in the mutual development of the liberated powers and united energies of our citizens to require of the state anything resembling constraint,” Gambetta declared, adding “. . . but neither do I wish to overthrow this

⁴¹⁷ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1867), 2:250.

⁴¹⁸ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1870), 3:302.

organization that keeps society in a state of equilibrium. We need a government. We need our government!”⁴¹⁹ Science and rationalism were the prerequisites of this new society, supporting social and material progress, cleansing Republican ideology of “metaphysical” elements, and aiding the formulation of new principles necessary for structuring the social and political institutions of a democratic and ultimately bourgeois political order.

Conceptions of decentralized authority and active citizenship promoted, moreover, a conviction that the civic ethos generated by the citizen’s participation in municipal politics would integrate the individual into the larger nation, combating the “cowardly egoism” of private life while nurturing a dynamic “public spirit.”⁴²⁰ The spiritual principles structuring Republican society—the overarching culture and beliefs linking the individual to the greater totality—could no longer be vested in the Church or religious dogma, as had once been the case. A definitive understanding of modernity, a belief in a secular society, and a dedication to the emancipation of the individual were all tied to the larger conception of civic regeneration in Republican thinking. The public sphere was, henceforth, the new church of the Republic, a conviction tantamount to Comte’s belief in a modern religious expression predicated upon “humanity” and socio-ethical principles. Reinterpreted within the context of Republican ideals, humanity signified the collective will of the people partaking in the greater entity of society and the state.

⁴¹⁹ Quoted in Deschanel, *Gambetta*, 32.

⁴²⁰ Speech by Pierre-Joseph Magnin, in *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1867), 2:250.

“Something momentous is emerging from the depths of our hearts,” claimed Pelletan in assessing the Republican movement under the empire. “It is time we open our windows and inhale the air of life deeply into our lungs.”⁴²¹ By the late 1860s, Pelletan’s stirring words were no longer an expression of mere hope or quixotic aspirations. The Republicans, having increased their numbers in the Corps législatif yet again after the elections of 1869, now constituted a political force with which to be reckoned. Appealing to Liberals and progressive elements within the bourgeoisie, the *jeune républicain* movement became a rallying point for the opposition with its instance upon a moderate and flexible doctrine that upheld the ideals of Republican government while dissociating itself from the revolutionary fury of the radicals. The “social question” which had occupied Republican thinking during the 1840s and which had frightened the French bourgeoisie after the June Days was replaced by a more practical concern for liberty, respect for law and order, the promotion of progress, and a distinct conception of citizenship in a modern and democratic state. Indeed, by 1872, Léon Gambetta could declare with certainty: “there is no social question” [*Il n’y a pas un question sociale*].⁴²²

The breadth and scope of the Republican renaissance which came to fruition in the 1860s was the product of the rational and progressive thinking of the *jeune républicain* movement. In creating an alternative doctrine to the authoritarian and, at times, parochial policies of Bonapartism, Republicans were able to capitalize on the imperial regime’s waning popularity and entice a broader section of the French public with their conceptions of the state founded on the Comtean principles of order and

⁴²¹ Pelletan, *Le Monde Marche*, 223.

⁴²² Quoted in Pierre Barral, *Les fondateurs de la Troisième République* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968), 262.

progress and the values and sensibilities of the *nouvelle couche sociale* emerging during the 1850s and 1860s. By the end of the Second Empire, the efforts of the *jeune républicains* had made the Republican idea widely acceptable, giving Republicans a new hope in the political future of France. “We shall see it, we shall see it . . . our Republic,” exclaimed Pelletan in 1868; “. . . a beautiful social and political future will flow from the ugly task which we are carrying out at this time.”⁴²³ Prior to its declaration in 1870, the Third Republic already constituted a living reality in the minds of its founders.

⁴²³ Adam, *Mes sentiments et nos idées*, 202.

Conclusion

Aspirations, Realization and Transcendence

After a period of humiliating defeat and violent civil war—what was deemed the *année terrible*, or “terrible year” of 1870—Gustave Flaubert was, nonetheless, able to maintain an optimistic outlook for the future. “I think, like you,” he declared in a letter to his fellow novelist George Sand, “that the bourgeois republic can be established It will be the first time that we have lived under a government without principles. The era of positivism in politics is about to begin.”⁴²⁴ Flaubert’s assessment of a “bourgeois” republic was accurate, for the regime to come would be based upon, as the conservative Gaston de Saint-Valry observed, “a stratum of fresh-minted bourgeois, lawyers, doctors, [and] newly rich merchants, who expect in their turn to constitute *society* and to dominate local affairs.”⁴²⁵ The era of the *nouvelle couche sociale* spoken of by Gambetta had arrived in France under a government constituted on the principles of political “positivism.”

The Second Empire had come to power with a preconceived agenda. Hoping to unify the nation, Bonapartists bolstered a strong nationalist front and sought to expunge political divisions through suppression and political pandering. The ever-troubling “social question” was to be solved through the promotion of economic growth and industrial

⁴²⁴ Aimee L. McKenzie, ed., *The George Sand-Gustave Flaubert Letters* (New York: Liveright, 1949), 203.

⁴²⁵ Quoted in Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 48.

development, thus discouraging the class divisions which had shattered the July Monarchy and Second Republic. With the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870, the narrowly defined policies of the empire gave way to the broad and extensive program outlined by the Republican thinkers of the 1860s. The new Republican regime not only sought to ameliorate the current social and political ills plaguing the nation; it also desired, ultimately, to create a new type of society.

At the start of 1870, change was already in the air. The rising opposition in the Corps législatif and the waning popularity of the government at home had produced a sobering affect on Napoleon III, whose hope was to see his son succeed him on the French throne. In 1867, he dismissed his longest-serving prime minister, the unpopular conservative Eugène Rouher. This placatory gesture was not enough to mollify growing discontent with the imperial regime. Under increased pressure from the opposition, the emperor asked the moderate Emile Ollivier to form a government and to carry through the long-promised liberalization of the empire. Taking office on 2 January 1870, Ollivier's administration set to work drawing up a new constitution which would grant significant political powers to the legislature and begin the process of decentralizing the authoritarian state apparatus.⁴²⁶ That May, the nation enthusiastically approved the new "Liberal Empire" in a general plebiscite. Upon hearing the results, Napoleon III embraced his son and rejoiced: "My child, your coronation is assured with this plebiscite. More than ever we can look to the future without fear."⁴²⁷ Yet, contrary to the expectations of the emperor, nothing was assured.

⁴²⁶ Zeldin, *Emile Ollivier*, 140-41.

⁴²⁷ Quoted in Bresler, *Napoleon III*, 351-52.

Political difficulties at home signified only one problem facing the ailing Napoleon III by the late 1860s. The aggressive policies mounted by Prussian Minister-President Otto von Bismarck presented yet another dilemma. The defeat of Austria in 1866 had marked the halfway point in his strategic maneuvers to bring forth a unified German state. Concluding the brief Austro-Prussian War, the Peace of Prague secured the dissolution of the German Confederacy, the loose assemblage of thirty-nine German states under the nominal leadership of Austria, and replaced it with the Prussian-dominated North German Confederation. To complete his vision of a Greater Germany, Bismarck needed to annex the southern states of Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden. Such a strong power in the center of Europe augured the loss of French hegemony on the Continent and would establish a permanent military threat along the Rhine. Convinced that Napoleon III could never accept a unified Germany, Bismarck stirred up nationalist fervor within the German states and set his sights on war with the Second Empire. On 19 July 1870, after persistent needling and provocation, France stumbled into a conflict it could not hope to win.⁴²⁸

The French minister of war, Marshal Edmond le Bouef, famously assured Napoleon III that the army was prepared for combat “down to the last garter button.”⁴²⁹ In pure Napoleonic form, the emperor decided to lead his troops into battle amid cries of “*A bas la Prusse!*” and “*A Berlin!*” The optimism proved premature, as a reverse at Saarbrücken was followed by a series of defeats at Wissembourg, Spicheren and

⁴²⁸ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809-1918* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948), 127; Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 92-94; Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 1:298.

⁴²⁹ Quoted in J.P.T. Bury, *Gambetta and the National Defense: A Republican Dictatorship in France* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1971), 32.

Fröschwiller. The Ollivier government, unable to produce a military victory, quickly fell apart under accusations of incompetence and machinations orchestrated by conservative opponents at home. With the imperial regime hanging by a thread and the war effort growing bleaker by the day, Napoleon III realized all was now lost. On the battlefield of Sedan, he rode his horse back and forth through the volley of enemy fire, desperately seeking the glorious death befitting a Bonaparte rather than the ignominy awaiting him back in Paris.⁴³⁰ Although three horses were shot out from under him, the emperor survived to be captured by Prussian forces on 2 September.

Once news of Napoleon III's capture reached Paris, the opposition deputies recognized that their chance had come. Storming the Hôtel de Ville on 4 September, they proclaimed the Republic. In spite of this bloodless revolution and the patriotic zeal supporting *guerre à outrance*, the provisional government set up under Léon Gambetta was unable to match the military might of the Prussian army. On 25 January 1871, the novelist Edmond de Goncourt wrote disparagingly in his journal, "there is no longer room for the absurdities of hope."⁴³¹ A few days later, the provisional government grudgingly came to the same opinion. Negotiating an armistice with Bismarck and signing a humiliating peace treaty which strapped France with a five-billion-franc war indemnity and ceded the territories of Alsace and Lorraine to the new German Empire, the Third Republic swallowed the bitter pill of defeat. The mortification suffered during the Franco-Prussian War raised serious concern as to whether or not the Republic would be permanently discredited in the eyes of the nation. The newly elected National

⁴³⁰ Roger L. Williams, *The Mortal Napoleon III* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 154.

⁴³¹ Edmond Goncourt, *Paris Under Siege, 1870-1871: From the Goncourt Journal*, ed., George J. Becker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 210.

Assembly, a provisional body charged with the dual task of negotiating peace and establishing a government, contained an overwhelming conservative majority. Meeting symbolically at Versailles, the traditional center of royal government under the Ancien Régime, the National Assembly exacerbated growing Republican anxieties. Monarchists were already calling for the last-surviving Bourbon, the Comte de Chambord, to return to France from his exile in Austria, hailing him “Henri V.”⁴³²

As excited calls of “*Vive le Roi!*” clashed with the ardent cries of “*Vive la République!*” in the early spring of 1871, the bloodless revolution of September gave way to one of the most sanguinary struggles in French history. On 18 March, radicals, fearing that the Republic would be stolen away from them as it had been in 1848, rose up in rebellion and proclaimed Paris an independent commune. With the government at Versailles, the revolutionaries occupied the traditional offices of state, raising the red flag over the Hôtel de Ville. The conservative Orleanist Adolphe Thiers, serving as the nominal head of state since February, quickly recognized the gravity of the situation facing France. No stranger to the revolutionary temperament of Paris, Thiers had always maintained that had he been charged with quelling the insurrection of the June Days in 1848, the unruly Parisians would have been drowned in their own blood. With the declaration of the insurrectionary commune, the aged politician was now offered the chance to vindicate his strong words with strong action.

As the government at Versailles began preparing for war, the Communards celebrated the atmosphere of anarchy and freedom seizing the capital. “I’m in a state of enchantment,” claimed the artist and Communard Gustave Courbet, one of the most vocal

⁴³² Samuel M. Osgood, *French Royalism Under the Third and Fourth Republics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 2-3.

critics of the Second Empire during the 1860s. “Paris is a true Paradise.”⁴³³ Expressions of delight and elation quickly dwindled, however, when news of the troops approaching from Versailles reached the city. Bracing themselves for the coming war, the Blanquists, having claimed the police prefecture under the brutal Raoul Rigault, commenced to round up as many priests and religious officials as possible, branding them enemies of the revolutionary government. As the government laid siege to Paris in May, the Blanquists gave free reign to their anticlerical passions, implementing a reign of terror which claimed the lives of numerous clerics, including the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris. Other Communards, realizing the futility of their resistance, set fire to the city, preferring to reduce Paris to ashes rather than allow it to fall into enemy hands. “The Commune, surrounded from every direction had only death on the horizon,” claimed the Commune Louise Michel. “It could only be brave, and it was.”⁴³⁴

The atrocities and acts of vandalism commended by Communards such as Michel appalled many moderate Republicans. In the violent civil war which unfolded during the spring of 1871, few of them were eager to extend support to the conservative Republican government headed by Thiers. Uncertain whether Thiers would countenance a republican form of government or conspire with the royalists to supplant the new regime with a constitutional monarchy, Republicans remained unable to formulate a unified policy of action. Were they to ally themselves with a potentially revived Party of Moral Order, betraying the very republic they had sought to bring into existence under the empire? Despite their ambivalence, moderates had taken the lesson of the Second Republic to

⁴³³ Quoted in Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 17.

⁴³⁴ Bullitt Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter, ed., *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 68.

heart, and many followed the government to Versailles after the uprising of 18 March. Those who did not officially endorse the repression of the Paris Commune stood by idly while the government meted out a harsh justice to the Communards during the “bloody week of May.” The ideological schism between radical Jacobins and the *jeunes républicains* evident under the Second Empire now conformed to the political realities of civil war. No longer willing to tolerate the intransigence of extremists which threatened to cost them yet another republic, moderates stood by while Thiers eradicated the Parisian revolutionary Left. “The bloodletting is a bleeding white,” Edmond de Goncourt wrote mordantly. “Such a purge, by killing off the combative part of the population, defers the next revolution by a whole generation.”⁴³⁵

With the suppression of the Commune by June 1871, moderates were now determined to save the tarnished Third Republic from the reactionary forces gathering within the conservative-dominated National Assembly. “French society is a democracy,” Edgar Quinet implored in 1872 in his support for the French Republic. “There is nobody who can contest it; it is our political axiom.”⁴³⁶ Even the conservative Thiers with his strong monarchist leanings was capable of seeing the political necessity of protecting the newly-won republic. “A restoration of the Monarchy,” he warned before the National Assembly in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, “would mean a revolution—the most deadly of them all.”⁴³⁷ The various French regimes since the Bourbon Restoration of 1815 had fallen prey to the same traps and pitfalls time after time, defining political

⁴³⁵ Goncourt, *Paris Under Siege*, 312.

⁴³⁶ Edgar Quinet, *La République: conditions de la régénération de la France* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1872), iv.

⁴³⁷ Quoted in Daniel Halévy, *The End of the Notables*, trans., Alain Silver and June Guicharnaud (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1974), 151.

agendas along narrow factional interests and effectively alienating broad support for the government. Thiers, an astute politician capable of deducing historical lessons from his nation's tempestuous past, tactfully protected the Third Republic from conservative and royalist machinations during the early 1870s, underscoring his firm conviction that the republic guaranteed stability because, as he famously said, "It divides us least."

As the democratic infrastructure of the government was established, the factionalism which the Bonapartists had sought in vain to expunge through suppression and political pandering was successfully integrated into the Third Republic, as politicians of all colors stood for election to the legislature. Radicals, whose virtual exclusion from political office under the imperial regime had encouraged the formation of conspiratorial societies, now entered into the political arena as reformers rather than revolutionaries; conservatives adopted parliamentary strategies to safeguard their own political interests; moderate "opportunists" maneuvered between the two factions as their immediate interests dictated: this fluid and vigorous political culture became the hallmark of Republican France as the 1870s progressed into the 1880s, marking the transition from the restrictive political life of the Second Empire to the mass political participation and democratic institutions of the Republican era.⁴³⁸

The origins of the Third Republic, both ideologically and culturally, owed a great debt to the *jeunes républicains* of the 1860s. The fusing of Republican ideology with strains of philosophical Positivism served to link the political cause of Republican elites to the broader intellectual perspectives of the imperial period. With its emphasis on

⁴³⁸ Eugen Weber, "The Nineteenth-Century Fallout," in Geoffrey Best, ed., *The Permanent Revolution: The French Revolution and its Legacy, 1789-1989* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 165; Lehning, *To Be a Citizen*, 2-3.

science and reason, Positivism drew Republican theorists away from ideological utopias and fostered a pragmatic political realism which would influence the Republican leadership of the coming generation.⁴³⁹ In the spirit of this realism, the men of the Third Republic were forced to come to terms with the new geopolitical realities facing them on the Continent. Defeat in the Franco-Prussian War revealed the military and technological superiority of Germany. Under the Second Empire, reformers and critics had warned of the scientific advantage evident across the Rhine in both industrial capacity and educational institutions. Their apprehensions fell, nevertheless, on deaf ears throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Only in the aftermath of war did such urgings assume a critical importance. The advent of a puissant German Empire in the east compelled French politicians and reformers to encourage scientific progress with an almost religious zeal. The needs of the state prompted the integration of scientific learning into French education curricula and fostered state-funded research for projects concerned with national security and the development of military technologies. Broadly speaking, science profited from the Third Republic's drive to keep pace with its German neighbor, as research, education, and common scientific practice became better organized and more effective than under the imperial regime.⁴⁴⁰

Yet prior to the tragedy of the *année terrible*, science connoted a predominant concern of Republican theorists. Collective perceptions of science and progress did not comprise a specific body of knowledge or distinct methodology necessarily; they operated primarily as ideological terms, justifying certain principles such as

⁴³⁹ Barral, *Les Fondateurs de la Troisième République*, 21-26.

⁴⁴⁰ Digeon, *La Crise Allemande de la Pensée Française*, 98-99; Paul, *From Knowledge to Power*, 12.

anticlericalism and serving to associate the Republican idea with a specific social group and culture growing up under the Second Empire. The *Union libérale* of 1863 marked a victory for Republican elites seeking to broaden the appeal of their social program. The growing accord between Republicans and bourgeois Liberals was reinforced by a mutual aversion to the authoritarian policies of Napoleon III and a shared feeling that social and political change in France failed to reflect the new feelings of modernity being generated by economic and industrial expansion. Taking their cause into the Corps législatif, the *jeunes républicains* condemned the extremism of Jacobin radicals and outlined a brand of moderate Republicanism which was “modern” in its outlook, which encouraged political stability through its democratic principles, which was dedicated to the development of industry and finance in the name of progress and which was founded on the precepts of reason and science, the new creed of a rising urban elite.

Yet the Republican victory remained part of a larger phenomenon. During the Second Empire, Republicans were able to define their political cause within a set of clear and comprehensive terms popularized by prevailing intellectual currents. A mood of restlessness and divergence afflicted the period, as the awakening of a new mentality engendered a definitive feeling of modernity in the popular imagination. Yet it was a modernity established ultimately on the cultural, intellectual, and moral outlook of middle-class elites. Laying claim to the future, a generation of new thinkers constructed a conception of modernity consistent with their own social outlooks and ambitions. Science and progress constituted an expressive language, conceptualizing a world in which the values, symbols, and ideals of the urban middle class predominated.

In nearly every aspect of French urban life, this mode of modernity was manifesting itself with an astounding ubiquity. Underscoring themes of scientific progress and individual ingenuity, Republicans saw themselves as defenders of a new world on the verge of realization and identified their cause in opposition to the sclerotic and oppressive forces—whether the Church or the authoritarian political state—which they believed to be inhibiting the emergence of this dynamic society. Their crusade became, ultimately, one with the mentality of the age, a concurrence which the Second Empire remained unable to achieve in nearly two decades of rule.

In the mind of the forward-looking Frenchman at mid century, Modernity promised advancement, transcendence, and novelty. It was a conception spanning a broad range of ideas and persuasions, linking the lyricism and imagination of Baudelaire with the industrial visions of Pelletan, the certitude of Taine with the defiance of Tridon, the sublime prophecy of Comte with the fortitude of Gambetta. A perceptive awareness of contemporary life and a feeling of inexorable change to come gave expression to the ideals and aspiration of a new generation coming of age under a second Bonaparte. No longer able to identify with the principles and concerns of their predecessors, they looked to the future with optimism. That future would belong to this new generation, bringing with it a new politic, a new aesthetic, and a new ethos. “We want,” wrote Baudelaire, “[for] such is the fire that burns our brains, to plunge into the depths of the abyss, Hell or Heaven, what does it matter? To the depths of the unknown to find something *new*.”⁴⁴¹

Yet an irrevocable thrust forward was first required in order to cast off the slough of past generations, and when the moment arrived, the Republicans did not fail to seize it.

⁴⁴¹ Baudelaire, “Le Voyage,” *Selected Poems*, 145.

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