Introduction

The aim of the nineteenth-century volume of the *Cambridge History of Political Thought* is to provide a systematic and up-to-date scholarly account of the development of the central themes of political and social thinking in the century following the French Revolution. Its purpose is not to reinforce a canon but rather to trace the emergence of particular preoccupations and to delineate the development of distinctive forms and languages of political thinking. As in the preceding volumes, the aim will be to analyse the provenance and character of leading political ideas, to relate them to the specific historical contexts within which they arose and to examine the circumstances in which their influence made itself felt. This thematic approach has many advantages. But we do not consider it appropriate in every case. In a few instances – those of Hegel, Marx, Bentham and Mill – we have largely devoted chapters to a single author. For in assessing such major thinkers, whose influence and reputations have reached down to the present, we have considered it important that readers be enabled to evaluate their work as a whole.

A volume devoted to nineteenth-century political thought poses special problems of scope and scale not encountered in earlier historical periods. The first problem is that of scope. In the nineteenth century, the boundary between political and other types of thought cannot be drawn with the precision which may be possible in other periods. For if the definition of the *political* is too narrowly drawn, much of the most important political thinking of the nineteenth century would fall outside it. The formal boundaries of political thought were already breaking down in the eighteenth century. But the process was greatly accentuated in the period following the French Revolution in which so many inherited political categories were thrown into disarray. Natural jurisprudence which had provided a framework for so much systematic political theorising from Grotius to Rousseau and Kant was largely discarded. The juridical framework which had been

appropriate to the discussion of sovereignty, contract and representation could no longer encompass new conceptions derived from political economy, medicine, social science, history and aesthetics. Novel thinking about politics to a large extent developed within these ancillary areas and some of the most important political thinkers of the nineteenth century – Marx and Tocqueville, for example – never wrote a formal treatise on politics. In the face of this intellectual shift, any attempt to confine this volume to a study of nineteenth-century political theory, narrowly defined, would have produced a seriously lopsided picture of the character and range of political thinking in the period. For this reason, considerable attention has been paid to the development of political economy, to changes in the conception of law and history, to social and natural science and to aesthetics.

The second problem is that of scale. Until the late eighteenth century, a history of political thought could by and large concentrate upon the writings of small learned groups in Western Europe with a sidelong glance at the American colonies. But in the nineteenth century, the number of authors and readers increased immeasurably. The American and French Revolutions stimulated political debate among groups and in regions where, before, it had barely existed. The spread of democratic radicalism, nationalism, socialism and feminism were in large part products of this seismic shift in political expectations. Furthermore, European expansion, the growth of world trade and the formation of new nation states spread new political ideas across the world. There were followers of Comte and Mill to be found from Brazil to China and from such tiny groupings were to develop traditions of Europeanised political and intellectual debate that interacted in various ways with indigenous political cultures. In Europe itself, the growth of population, urbanisation and the spread of literacy brought a far broader spectrum of the 'people' within the ambit of informed political discussion. The proliferation of newspapers, periodicals and tracts testified to this vast increase in demand. In sheer bulk, the volume of political writings in the nineteenth century probably outweighed that of all preceding centuries combined.

One favoured way of attempting to characterise and chart the development of nineteenth-century political thought has been to tell a story about the triumph and faltering of the idea of 'progress'. Such an idea was well established by the French Revolution, but was lent enormous impetus by scientific discoveries and inventions and a steadily rising standard of living at least for the middle classes, and after mid-century often for the working classes as well. At its peak around the middle of the century, the pervasiveness

of this idea was captured particularly in notions of 'civilisation', of the sharp division between 'advanced' and 'backward' societies or sometimes between 'white' and other races, and of the vaunted superiority of the morals and manners attendant upon science, Christianity and commerce. Conversely, the period from the 1880s to the First World War is often depicted as that of a crisis of reason, in which various forms of nationalism, neo-romanticism, irrationalism, mysticism, political pessimism and cults of violence captured the imagination of the new, uprooted and restless intelligentsias thrown up by the social, scientific and political changes of the period.

There is no doubt that this approach captures some of the most significant as well as most eye-catching developments of the period. But such an interpretation, as this volume demonstrates, also has real limitations. Its vision is too selective. In the first half of the century, it underplays the traumas attendant upon the decline or loss of the religious and political hierarchies of the *ancien régime*, not to mention new Malthusian anxieties about overpopulation. Conversely, its depiction of intellectual, political and cultural developments after 1870 is inescapably coloured by a sense of the tragic denouement to come in the First World War. Consequently, it misses equally prominent expressions of optimism about education, international arbitration, peaceful economic development, social security and civic and democratic participation in the new conditions of urban life. For these reasons, we have made no attempt to construct an overarching picture of the direction of political thought in the century as a whole or to reduce the diversity of developments recounted in individual essays.

Since the size of this volume is limited, there is no optimal, let alone comprehensive, way in which all this diversity of topics can be accommodated. We have devoted more space to the literature of nationalism, socialism, republicanism and feminism than is customary in more traditional pictures of nineteenth-century political theory and we have attempted to consider the impact of Western political thought viewed from outside Europe, as well as investigating changing European conceptions of empire. Generally, we have avoided a country-by-country enumeration of forms of political thought, in favour of a more thematic organisation of the subject matter. But once again, this rule has not been applied rigidly. In certain cases, we have found a national framework to be the most illuminating way of considering a particular body of political literature. Thus the development of American and Russian political thought has been given separate treatment (Chapters 12 and 23), while other chapters discuss the peculiar problems of German liberalism and German social democracy (Chapters 13 and 22).

A further problem, but not one peculiar to the nineteenth century, is where to begin and where to end. This volume begins in the mid-1790s with thinkers for whom the French Revolution was generally the first and most formative event in their intellectual careers. It concludes around the end of the long nineteenth century at a point at which European expansion, industrialisation, evolutionary biology and construction of new political and constitutional forms in Europe and America had laid the basis for new types of political thinking. It reaches the critical stage of modernism, but does not cross it.

But in an enterprise of this kind, beginnings and endings cannot be made too neat. Few straight lines can be drawn from the 1790s through to the 1890s. All that can be offered is a kind of zigzag, as much generational as chronological and very roughly corresponding to turning points in political thinking. In the case of the French Revolution, the reaction of already established political thinkers has been included in the preceding volume. Therefore, this volume begins with Malthus rather than Paine, Coleridge rather than Burke, Constant and Chateaubriand rather than Condorcet and Sieyès, Fichte and Hegel rather than Kant and Herder. The end of the period is more indeterminate. There was no single commanding event comparable to 1789. But there were secular shifts clustering around the 1870s and 1880s – the Franco-Prussian War, the demise of free trade, the heightened scramble for the colonies, the great depression, the rise of socialism and the emergence of new and non-traditional varieties of conservatism. By the end of the century, the tenets of democracy met with far greater favour than at the beginning, but there were also many more, often conflicting, forms of democratic theory. There was little industrialisation in 1800; by 1900 the size and poverty of the new industrial proletariat was a central problem for all theories of social and political order, and had provoked radical theories of social change very different from those which inspired the chief actors of the French Revolution. In 1800, the great estates and orders of European society had been rudely shocked by the actions and principles of the French reformers. A century later, the commercial middle classes enjoyed widespread social and political power, while monarchies and aristocracies found themselves defending an ever less plausible principle of legitimacy. At the time of Waterloo, the foundations had been laid for the new social and economic sciences. By the century's end, these had come to displace much earlier political thinking.

The choice of boundary line in the case of individual thinkers cannot be determined exactly and has been left for the most part to the judgement

of contributors. It includes Marshall and Sidgwick, but stops short at Hobhouse and Wallas, includes Jaurès but not Durkheim, Maurras or Bergson, includes Menger but not Pareto, Bernstein and Kautsky and some aspects of Nietzsche (there is further treatment of him in the twentieth-century volume).

In many respects, the attempt to map the contours of nineteenth-century political thought as a whole, and particularly on this scale, is new. Scholarly editions of the works of most of its major thinkers are still incomplete. In some cases, they do not exist. In others, they have remained, until very recently, still bedevilled by political controversy. In comparison with the early modern period or the eighteenth century, interpretative debates about the period as a whole have been rare and often dated. Until very recently most of the major interpreters of Hegel, Mill, Tocqueville, Comte, Proudhon and Marx have been more interested in the twentieth century than the nineteenth. Interpretations of these thinkers were to a large extent the pursuit of contemporary political debate by other means. It is only in the last thirty years that historians have ceased to be dazzled by the self-proclaimed modernity of the nineteenth century and have begun to investigate continuities in its political and social thinking which link it to earlier lineages of religious, political and social thought. This volume is therefore a pioneering venture since only now is it possible to attempt to redraw the whole of the scholarly map, and redefine the spectrum of nineteenth-century political thinking in terms much broader than that envisaged by the nineteenth century itself.

I

Political thought after the French Revolution

I
Counter-revolutionary thought

BEE WILSON

'The return to order', wrote Joseph de Maistre in 1797, in his plea for Restoration, the *Considérations sur la France*, 'will not be painful, because it will be natural and because it will be favoured by a secret force whose action is wholly creative . . . the restoration of monarchy, what they call the counter-revolution, will not be a *counter-revolution*, but the *contrary of revolution*' (Maistre 1994, p. 105). Maistre was fond of paradoxes, but this was not one of them. After all the 'perpetual and desperate oscillations' of French politics since 1789, Maistre argued for the need for stability, not commotion, peace, not violence, tranquillity not anarchy. Achieving this, he argued, necessitated a total separation from the political and intellectual methods of those who had favoured the Revolution. In place of de-Christianisation, was needed belief; in place of insurrection, obedience; in place of insubordination, sovereignty; in place of republic, the monarchy. In other words, what was needed in place of revolution was the contrary of revolution. This meant 'no shocks, no violence, no punishment even, except those which the true nation will approve' (Maistre 1994, p. 105). Maistre has been called a 'fanatical', 'monstruous' and 'disturbing' writer (Faguet 1891, p. 1; Cioran 1987; Berlin 1990, p. 57). Stendhal dubbed him the 'hangman's friend' because of his famous assertion, in the *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg* that the executioner was the secret 'tie' holding human society together (quoted in Berlin 1990, p. 57). Various nineteenth-century critics accused him of terrorism, while in the twentieth century he was tainted by a supposed association with fascism. Rather than accusing his political thought of violence, however, it would be more accurate to call him a theorist who refused to imagine any political order that did not have to grapple with and contain violence and terror.[1] '[W]e are spoiled by a modern philosophy

1 This interpretation of Maistre as theorist of violence rather than proponent of it is outlined in Bradley 1999.

that tells us all is good, whereas evil has tainted everything', he wrote in the *Considérations* (quoted in Spektorowski 2002, p. 287).

'He was born to hate the revolution', wrote Harold Laski of Maistre, suggesting that the spirit of reaction ran through Maistre's entire personality from birth (Laski 1917, p. 213). In fact, Maistre, like Antoine de Rivarol, Friedrich Gentz, Edmund Burke, Louis de Bonald and Mallet du Pan, along with most other thinkers that we would now classify as 'counter-revolutionaries', began his intellectual career from a position of reform and only hardened to an anti-revolutionary stance after the Revolution itself had begun. As Massimo Boffa writes, 'The counterrevolution was not defined by hostility to reform of the monarchy in 1789' (Boffa 1989, p. 641). Or, as Owen Bradley has written, 'counter-revolution was a part of the revolution itself' (Bradley 1999, p. 10). By 'counter-revolution', this chapter means not what Colin Lucas has called the 'anti-revolution' of practical and popular opposition to the Revolution (Lucas 1988), but the reaction in the sphere of ideas between around 1789 and 1830. As Jacques Godechot has shown, there was remarkably little linkage between anti-revolutionary practice and counter-revolutionary theory (Godechot 1972, p. 384). The anti-revolutionary émigrés could call for a straightforward restoration of the *ancien régime*, whereas counter-revolutionary thought was always more complicated than this. Counter-revolutionaries saw that there was no putting the genie back in the bottle (Maistre commented that you could no more reverse the Revolution than bottle the entire contents of Lake Geneva). Rather, the Revolution was the spur for new thought about how to achieve political stability. What the counter-revolutionary theorists denounced most consistently in the Revolution was its novelty, which had forced them unwillingly into sometimes novel positions. Burke inveighed against the novel abstractions of the architects of revolution. Friedrich Gentz after initially sympathising with the revolutionaries came to revile them for their unparalleled violence; where the American Revolution was in keeping with History, the French Revolution was an aggressive break from it (Gentz 1977, p. 49). For Maistre, it was that unsettling thing, an event without precedent – a horrible sequence of innovations which would necessitate novel responses. 'There is a satanic quality to the French Revolution that distinguishes it from everything we have ever seen or anything we are ever likely to see' (Maistre 1994, p. 41). The Revolution, in Maistre's view, was a 'calamity', a dreadful 'miracle', which lay outside the 'ordinary circle of crime' (Maistre 1994, p. 41).

It may be obvious, but it is also true, to say that, properly speaking, before 1789 there was no counter-revolutionary thought, in so far as this was itself the creation of the Revolution. It is possible, on the other hand, to trace numerous intellectual precursors of the counter-revolutionaries. On this score, the straightforward divine-right justifications of Bossuet were less important sources than the more ambivalent conservatism of Montesquieu, the writings on enlightened despotism of Diderot and Voltaire and, in both a positive and a negative sense, Rousseau. Isaiah Berlin made it fashionable to speak of the counter-revolutionaries as '"counter-enlightenment" thinkers', but in many respects the counter-revolutionaries were continuing rather than negating Enlightenment lines of argument.[2] Much counter-revolutionary thought can be read as an intramural debate within Rousseau studies. Counter-revolutionaries defended the 'honest', 'sincere' Rousseau who represented the socially cohesive virtue of civic religion and the politics of order, against the Rousseau of popular sovereignty and the social contract; they liked the Rousseau who attacked novels rather than the Rousseau who wrote them.[3]

It has become usual to start discussions of counter-revolutionary thought with Burke; in the case of England and Germany, this may be justified. In the case of francophone ideas, however (including Geneva and Savoy as well as France), it is less so. It is true that the *Reflections* was quickly translated into French and by the end of 1791 a very substantial 10,000 copies had been sold in five editions (Draus 1989, p. 79). It is also the case that many of Burke's themes resonated both with the moderate monarchists in the National Assembly and with the émigrés who had fled France (Lucas 1989, pp. 101ff.). Yet even if it did find an audience, the *Reflections* had very limited political influence in France. This was partly because Burkean ideas had already been expressed in France before the *Reflections* was known. As early as 1789, the Abbé Barruel had attacked the *philosophes*, just as Burke did, for their part in causing revolution by placing individual 'rights' before collective values (Godechot 1972, p. 42); Calonne – whose work on finance Burke praised (Burke 1988, pp. 116, 209) – had defended prejudice against

2 For various examinations of the term 'counter-enlightenment', see Berlin 1990; Garrard 1994; Mali and Wokler 2003; McMahon 2001.

3 Louis de Bonald, in fact, expressed his attitude to Rousseau in exactly these terms: Bonald 1864, II, p. 25: Bonald states that Rousseau was right to remind mothers of their domestic duties, but wrong to inflame their imaginations with his novel-writing. On Rousseau's importance for counter-revolutionary thought, see also Garrard 1994; McNeil 1953; Melzer 1996.

abstract *a priori* rationalising; in many articles in *Le Mercure* and the journal *Politique national*, Antoine de Rivarol had criticised the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and defended the throne and obedience to it in terms which may even have influenced Burke (Godechot 1972, pp. 33–4). Most substantially and influentially of all, the Swiss journalist Jacques Mallet du Pan, who from the summer of 1789 was connected with the small group within the Constituent Assembly known as 'monarchiens', had begun a thoroughgoing critique of the Revolution from the point of view of moderation. In everything Mallet du Pan wrote on politics, there was a horror of anarchy. Burke – about whom Mallet expressed ambivalence – would criticise the Declaration of the Rights of Man on the grounds of its metaphysical abstraction. Mallet du Pan's objections were more pragmatic. Either the Declaration would not be applied (and was therefore useless) or it would be (and was therefore extremely dangerous). Mallet du Pan is a good place to begin a consideration of counter-revolutionary writing, because he is the closest thing there was to that contradictory personage, namely, a pre-revolutionary counter-revolutionary.

1 Mallet du Pan and the intellectual roots of counter-revolution

Like Rousseau, Jacques Mallet du Pan approached the politics of the rest of the world primarily through the peculiar prism of Geneva. Mallet du Pan was born in 1749 in a village called Céligny twelve miles from Geneva into the patriciate, the commercial aristocracy which effectively controlled the government of Geneva. In his outlook, however, formed through education at the Collège de Génève and friendship with Voltaire during his Swiss exile, Mallet du Pan was not patrician. In his first published work of 1770, the *Compte Rendu*, Mallet du Pan wrote defending the cause of 'natifs', the descendants of so-called 'inhabitants' of Geneva, immigrant families who were without political rights. In the strange hierarchy of Genevan society, law was made in the Conseil Général, consisting of all adult males who were citizens. Outside of this were the majority of those who lived in Geneva: the 'strangers', 'inhabitants' and their children the 'natifs', who had no political existence, because being born in Geneva did not bestow citizenship. Within the body of the Conseil Général was the Small Council of twenty-five and the Great Council of two hundred. During the 1760s, the middle-class Représentants lobbied for the general body of citizens to have more power within the Conseil Géneral. In 1768, the Edict of Conciliation gave the General Council a say in electing the Council of two hundred. But nothing