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## Essay I General Separation between Opinions and Desires<sup>1</sup>

Rulers would like us to accept the maxim that in politics they alone are capable of clear-sightedness, and that it is therefore for them alone to have an opinion on this subject. They certainly have their reasons for speaking thus, and the ruled have exactly the same reasons for refusing to accept this principle, which in fact, considered in itself and without the prejudices of either ruler or ruled, is indeed totally absurd. For, on the contrary, rulers – even if we suppose them to be upright – are by their position the most incapable of forming a just and elevated opinion on general politics; since the more one is immersed in practice, the less one is able to have a clear view of theory. A necessary condition for a publicist who wants to form broad political ideas is strictly to abstain from any public office or employment: for how could he be at the same time actor and spectator?

But in this regard men have gone from one extreme to the other. In combating the rulers' ridiculous pretension to exclusive political wisdom they have engendered in the ruled the prejudice – no less ridiculous, though less dangerous – that any man is capable, by instinct alone, of forming a just opinion of the political system, and each of us has asserted the duty to set himself up as a legislator.

<sup>1</sup> This essay was submitted to *Le Censeur* in July 1819, but was not published.

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As Condorcet observed,<sup>2</sup> it is a singular fact that men think it impertinent to presume to know physics or astronomy, etc., without having studied these sciences; and yet that they believe at the same time that anyone can understand political science, and have a settled and trenchant opinion on its most abstract principles, without the necessity of taking the trouble to reflect about it and making a special study of it.

That stems, as Condorcet should have added, from the fact that politics is not yet a positive science: for it is obvious that, when it has become such, everyone will realize that to understand it it is essential to have studied the observations and deductions on which it is founded.

However, to achieve a synthesis, to exclude this prejudice without falling back on the principle of political indifference so dear to rulers, it would be right to distinguish, more than we have yet done, between opinions and desires. It is reasonable, it is natural, it is necessary for every citizen to have political desires, because every man has an interest of some kind in the conduct of social affairs; it is, for example, straightforward to understand that all citizens who do not belong to the privileged class, and who live off the product of their labours, desire liberty, peace, industrial prosperity, economy in public spending, and the proper use of taxation. But a political opinion expresses more than desires; it is, besides, the assertion – most often decided and absolute – that these desires can only be satisfied by such and such means, and by no others. And it is on this sort of thing that it is ridiculous and unreasonable to pronounce without special thought. For it is obvious that, in the question of whether such a measure or such an institution is capable of achieving a given goal, there is a chain of reasoning and of reflection which, to be undertaken properly, demands a special study of this kind of consideration. In the absence of this, we should believe certain means capable of attaining a goal, whereas they would in fact have a wholly opposite effect. Thus many people sincerely desire liberty and peace but at the same time have such a false idea of the appropriate means to obtain them that, if these means were

<sup>2</sup> Here, as elsewhere, Comte overstates the similarity of his own views with those of Condorcet. See Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: from natural philosophy to social mathematics* (Chicago and London 1975), p. 340.

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put into practice, they would lead, on the contrary, to disorder and arbitrariness.

Two important political consequences follow, I think, from this analysis of opinions and desires.

First, by looking at things in this way, and considering the political opinions of unenlightened men as the expression of desires confused with that of means, we can see that there exists more uniformity than is ordinarily imagined in the political wills of a nation. In France, for example, among the individuals who profess retrograde opinions, there are only a small number, composed of those who were formerly privileged, who really – that is, with full knowledge of the facts – desire the re-establishment of the old institutions; the great majority basically want, with everyone, liberty, peace and economy. They associate the idea of the feudal regime with this desire only because they regard it as the only kind of regime capable of securing these ends for them.

Secondly, it seems to me, we can see how from the same analysis we can determine the share which the mass of a nation must take in government. The public alone should indicate the goal, because, if it does not always know what it needs, it knows precisely what it wants, and no one should take it into his head to will on its behalf. But as for the means of attaining this goal, it is for political scientists<sup>3</sup> alone to concern themselves with this, once it has been clearly indicated by public opinion. It would be absurd for the masses to seek to reason about it. It is for public opinion to form a will, publicists to suggest means of execution, and rulers to execute. As long as these three functions are not distinct, there will be a greater or lesser degree of confusion and arbitrariness.

In short, when politics has become a positive science, the public will have to accord publicists – and will necessarily accord them – the same confidence in politics that it currently accords to astronomers in astronomy, to physicians in medicine, etc.; but with this difference that it will be for the public alone to indicate the goal and the direction of the undertaking.

This confidence has had the most serious disadvantages whilst politics has been vague, mysterious, indeterminate, in a word theological; but when politics is a positive science, that is a science of

<sup>3</sup> The French here is 'savants en politique'.

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observation, it will have no more drawbacks than the confidence which we every day fearlessly accord to a doctor, to whom we are nevertheless often entrusting our life.

In this state of things, the submission which is due to reason, and the precautions which must be taken against arbitrary power, will be perfectly reconciled.

## Essay 2

### Summary Appraisal of the General Character of Modern History<sup>1</sup>

The system which the course of civilization calls us to replace was the combination of spiritual (or papal and theological) power and temporal (or feudal and military) power.

As regards spiritual power, the birth of this system should be traced back to the emergence of the preponderance of Christianity in Europe, that is around the third or fourth century. As for temporal power, we should place its origin around the same period: in the first great attempts by the northern peoples to settle in the South of Europe, and in the earliest dismemberments of the Roman Empire.

These two powers were definitively constituted in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. At that time, on the one hand feudalism was universally established on settled foundations, as a national power; and on the other hand, the authority of the Holy See was fully organized as a European power.

Let us dwell for a moment on this notable period, to make two important observations.

In the first place, this dual organization was brought into being in a short time and without much difficulty, because it had been gradually prepared during the seven or eight hundred years that had passed since the birth of the two powers.

<sup>1</sup> This essay was first published, under Saint-Simon's name, as the eighth and ninth letters of *L'Organisateur* in April 1820.

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The establishment of the temporal power was the consequence of the overthrow of Roman authority by the northern peoples. If this power was not constituted immediately after that authority had been totally annihilated, this was because for that to happen it was obviously necessary first of all to put an end to the pattern of irruptions, which happened with the victories of the first invading settlers over later invasions. This was the object of Charlemagne's wars against the Saxons and the Saracens, and then of the Crusades.

The constitution of the spiritual power had been prepared by the overthrow of polytheism, and by the establishment of the Christian religion, whose numerous clergy were spread throughout Europe.

When, in the eleventh century, Pope Hildebrand directly proclaimed the superiority of pontifical authority, as a European power, over national powers, he was only summing up a principle whose foundations had already been established in all minds, or, in other words, formulating a belief all the elements of which had long been accepted.

In the second place, the coincidence of the two powers, in respect of the period of their origin and in respect of that of their definitive constitution, deserves to be noted. We shall be able to observe the same analogy in relation to their decay, and this constant correspondence tends to prove (independently of our reasoning, which demonstrates that these two powers rest on each other) that they must disappear at the same time; that the temporal power could not be replaced by a power of a different kind, without the occurrence of an analogous replacement of the spiritual power; and vice versa.

This social system was born during the lifetime of the preceding system, and indeed at the time when the latter had just attained its full development. Equally, when the feudal and theological system was constituted in the middle ages, the germ of its destruction was coming into being and the elements of the system which is to replace it today had just been created.

Indeed, as regards the temporal power, it was in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the enfranchisement of the communes began. As regards the spiritual power, it was roughly at the same time that the positive sciences were introduced into Europe by the Arabs.

Let us focus all our attention on this capital fact, which is the true point of departure for the series of observations by which we must today enlighten our politics.

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It is industrial capacity, or the manufacturing arts and crafts, that must be substituted for the feudal or military power.

At a time when war was and had to be regarded as the primary means to prosperity for nations, it was natural for the direction of the temporal affairs of society to be in the hands of a military power, and for industry, classed as subordinate, to be employed only as an instrument. By contrast, when societies are at last convinced by experience that the only means for them to acquire wealth consists in pacific activity – that is in industrial activity – the direction of temporal affairs must naturally pass to industrial capacity, and military force in turn can only be classed as subordinate, as a purely passive force, probably even destined one day to become wholly useless.

The enfranchisement of the communes laid the basis for this new state of things; it made it possible and even necessary; and as we shall soon prove it subsequently became increasingly necessary. This enfranchisement brought about industrial capacity, since it established for the latter a social existence independent of the military power.

Before this period, quite apart from the fact that artisans taken collectively were absolutely dependent upon the military, each of them was wholly subject to the individual whim of the possessor of the land of which he formed a part.

Enfranchisement, while allowing the first kind of arbitrariness to remain, annihilated the second, and consequently created the germ of the destruction of the first. Previously, artisans possessed nothing of their own; everything they possessed, themselves included, belonged to their lord; they had only what he was willing to allow them. Enfranchisement created industrial property originating in labour, a distinct and independent kind of property which soon came to rival territorial property, which was purely military in origin and character.

Through this memorable innovation, industrial capacity could develop, progress and expand, and nations could organize themselves in all their parts on an industrial basis; only the head of society remained military, along with the general government which remained in its hands.

Let us make observations about the spiritual power analogous to those we have just made for the temporal power.

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In the same way, it is positive scientific capacity that is to replace the spiritual power.

At a time when all particular knowledge was essentially conjectural and metaphysical, it was natural for the direction of society, as regards its spiritual affairs, to be in the hands of a theological power, since theologians were then the only general metaphysicians. By contrast, once our knowledge in all its parts is founded exclusively on observation, the direction of spiritual affairs must be entrusted to positive scientific capacity, since it is obviously far superior to theology and metaphysics.

The introduction of the positive sciences into Europe by the Arabs created the germ of this important revolution, which is today wholly complete as regards our particular knowledge, and as regards the critical part of our general doctrines.

The Arabs had scarcely begun to establish schools for teaching the sciences of observation in the parts of Europe they had conquered, when a general fervour directed all the most eminent minds towards this new light. Similar schools soon arose throughout western Europe; observatories, dissecting theatres, natural history collections were instituted in Italy, in France, in England, in Germany. Already in the thirteenth century Roger Bacon was doing brilliant work in the physical sciences. The superiority of the positive over the conjectural, of physics over metaphysics, was so clearly felt from the beginning, even by the spiritual power, that several eminent members of the clergy, among them two popes more or less in the same period, went to complete their education at Cordova, where they studied the sciences of observation under Arab professors.

Thus, summing up our foregoing observations, we can lay down the factual rule that at the moment when the feudal and theological system was definitively organized, the elements of a new social system began to form. A positive temporal capacity – that is, industrial capacity – came into being alongside the temporal power that had attained its fullest development; and a positive spiritual capacity – that is, scientific capacity – arose behind the spiritual power, at the moment when the latter was beginning to develop its activity to the full.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The division of society, and of everything relating to society, into temporal and spiritual, must continue in the new system as in the old. This division, which did not exist among the Romans, is the most important innovation in social organiz-



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Before passing to the examination of subsequent events, let us consider this notable difference between the two systems, which is to be seen from the birth of the new system, and which I have tried to express by the contrast between the words power and capacity. I do not say: a new power arises alongside each of the old powers, but: a *capacity* arises alongside a *power*. In other words, the action of principles came into being then and is today substituting itself for the action of men; reason is to replace will.

Because in the old system temporal power was military, it demanded by its nature the highest degree of passive obedience on the part of the nation. By contrast, in industrial capacity, considered as destined to direct the temporal affairs of society, arbitrary will has no place and can have no place, since, on the one hand, in the plan it can form to work for general prosperity everything is capable of rational assessment; and on the other the execution of this plan needs only to a very limited extent to resort to commands.

In the same way the spiritual power, being by nature conjectural, necessarily had to require the highest degree of trust and mental submission. That was an indispensable condition for its existence and its action. By contrast, positive spiritual capacity, conceived as directing the spiritual affairs of society, demands neither blind belief nor even trust, at least on the part of all those who are capable of understanding logical demonstration; as for the rest, experience has given sufficient proof that their faith in the demonstrations unanimously agreed among positive scientists can never be prejudicial to them, and that this kind of faith is in short not capable of being abused.

Thus we can, if we wish, consider positive scientific capacity as giving rise to a power, insofar as it creates strength; but it is the power of demonstration instead of the power of revelation.

This is therefore our point of departure:

In the eleventh century, the temporal power and the spiritual power were definitively constituted, and at the same time two positive capacities began to form behind these two powers, and to prepare the way for their decay and their replacement. In short, one

ation made by the moderns. This is what originally created the possibility of making politics into a science, by allowing us to make theory distinct from practice. But in the new system this division is no longer between two powers, but between two capacities.

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system was established, and another was born. Since that period, these two systems have always coexisted, colliding with each other sometimes silently and sometimes openly, in such a way that the first has increasingly lost its strength, whereas the second has increasingly grown in strength.

The examination of the past is therefore divided, from this moment, into two contemporaneous series: the first consisting of observations on the decay of the old system, and the second of the building of the new one. This is also the division which we are going to follow in all that remains to be said.

### First series

In the era we have just settled on for the origin of our observations, the balance of forces between the two coexisting systems (one of which was entering maturity, whereas the other was only just born) was too unequal for it to be possible for any direct and palpable struggle to arise between them for long. Besides, history shows us that the struggle began to exist openly only in the sixteenth century. The four or five hundred years which had gone before formed the period of splendour of the feudal and theological system. But all this splendour rested on a minefield.

If historians had better analysed and more closely examined the Middle Ages, they would not have spoken to us solely of the visible aspect of this period; they would have noticed the gradual preparation of all the great events which unfolded later, and they would not have presented the explosions of the sixteenth century and the following centuries as sudden and unforeseen. However that may be, it was incontestably only in the sixteenth century that the open struggle began between the two systems. That is where we shall take it up.

Luther's and his fellow reformers' attack on pontifical authority constituted a *de facto* overthrow of the spiritual power as a European power; and that was its true political character. At the same time it sapped the roots of the influence which theological authority still retained by destroying the principle of blind belief, replacing this principle with critical enquiry, which, at first confined within quite narrow limits, would inevitably expand continuously and in the end embrace an unlimited field.