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Abstract

This paper explores the intertwinement of religion, utopia, and modernity in nineteenth-century French culture, through a study of the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867. The international exhibitions that began with the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851 were among the largest and most important cultural events of the nineteenth century. They aimed to be both didactic and entertaining; their displays were intended to be simultaneously encyclopaedic and celebratory. In recent years, a sizeable body of historical literature has grown up around the exhibitions, illuminating the role they played in propagating the culture of modernity and the faith in progress that were so hegemonic in the nineteenth century. The Universal Exhibition of 1867, however, stands out as something of a peculiarity among these exhibitions, and previous histories of exhibitions have not adequately accounted for this peculiarity. Organised primarily by the social Catholic Frédéric Le Play and the Saint-Simonian Michel Chevalier, it contained pronounced strains of religiosity and utopianism intertwined with the usual reverence for the products of modern industry. Through an examination of the Exhibition and the debates surrounding it, this paper argues that religious utopianism was a powerful current in nineteenth-century French thought and culture. In particular, it will be argued that the Exhibition of 1867 reveals the shift from the utopian socialism of the early nineteenth century to a kind of utopian capitalism under the Second Empire of Napoleon III. In making this argument, this paper seeks to reassess the role of utopianism in modern culture, and also to problematise the assumption that modernity and religiosity are incompatible.
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Introduction

In 1867, the most important cultural event on the European continent was the Universal Exhibition being held in Paris from April through November. Like all nineteenth-century international exhibitions, it aimed to inspire and amaze with displays of technology, art, and curios from around the world. The product of a decade and a half of competition between French and British exhibitions, the Exhibition of 1867 dwarfed all its predecessors: with some 52,000 exhibitors and as many as 15 million visitors spread out over an area of 68 hectares, it was, at the time, by far the largest cultural gathering in history.  

And, for the most part, it was greeted with suitably enthusiastic praise from contemporaries. Pierre Larousse struck a typical, if somewhat hyperbolic note in his *Grand Dictionnaire du dix-neuvième siècle*:

> Just as in the history of all nations, there is only one prison called *The Bastille*, one religious movement called *The Reformation*, one political revolution called *The Revolution*.... Among all known Expositions there is only one which is called, and may forever be called, *The Exposition*—the Exposition of 1867.  

Along with the excitement about the Exhibition’s unprecedented size and grandeur, came breathless praise for all that the Exhibition represented: technological progress, cultural exchange, international cooperation, and all the other ideals that are typically associated with the great world’s fairs of the nineteenth century. For instance, one of the official guidebooks for the Exhibition opened by declaring that “the progress of industry has left an indelible mark on our century,” and went on to explain that “exhibitions of works of art and works of

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industry have been the first steps in this progressive movement.” Pronouncements like these have generally led historians to interpret world’s fairs as showpieces of the ascendant culture of modernity. But what kind of modernity was on display in 1867? How did contemporaries understand the significance of the Exhibition, and what cultural and intellectual presuppositions underscored their understanding?

A clue about how to begin answering these questions can be found in the introduction to the multi-volume reports of the international jury written by Michel Chevalier, president of the jury, member of the Exhibition’s Imperial Commission, and one of the most important figures in the history of exhibitions. In this text, Chevalier offers a striking account of the Exhibition and its significance. Like Pierre Larousse, Chevalier understood the Exhibition as a decisive step forward in the history of exhibitions, and he began his report with a historical survey of exhibitions up till 1867, complete with a barrage of facts and figures to highlight just how much bigger and more important the 1867 Expo was when compared with its predecessors. Then, with this out of the way, he declared that “there are facts which refuse to take on the cold formula of numbers,” and proceeded to a discussion of the Exhibition’s less quantifiable benefits, such as the fostering of peaceful exchange among nations, the instruction of the masses, and the encouragement of industrial progress—in short, all the commonplaces of exhibition literature. However, the language with which Chevalier framed his discussion is somewhat unusual by the standards of exhibition literature. After praising the Exhibition as a kind of “neutral terrain” in which the nations of the world could come

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3 L’Exposition universelle de 1867: guide de l’exposant et du visiteur (Paris: Hachette, 1866), 1-2. All translations from French sources are my own unless otherwise noted.

together to "contribute to the conservation of world peace," he offered up the following analysis:

The tendency toward the reconciliation of nations, this attraction—religious in a way—which was much more visible this time than it was in London in 1851 or 1862, or in Paris in 1855, was hardly foreign to the founding of universal exhibitions.\(^5\)

In celebrating the industrial role of the Exhibition, Chevalier alluded to a speech made by Prince Albert at the first universal exhibition, and argued that its importance rested upon the fact that it "placed industry at the heights to which it belongs, showing that it is the very fulfilment of the mission given to man by the Creator."\(^6\)

How are we to understand the presence of this oddly religious rhetoric in the jury report of a world’s fair? We might begin by looking at Chevalier’s background: from 1830 to 1832 he was one of the most prominent members of the Saint-Simonian movement of utopian socialists and one of the movement’s most skilled propagandists. Others with similar backgrounds can be found throughout the ranks of the Exhibition officials. The Exhibition’s commissioner-general was Frédéric Le Play, a Catholic social reformer who, though never a committed Saint-Simonian, had strong ties to the movement and was one of Chevalier’s closest friends. Other Saint-Simonians, such as the industrialists Émile Pereire and François-Barthélémy Arlès-Dufour, were also heavily involved with the international exhibitions of the 1850s and 1860s.\(^7\) Yet, while the role of these individuals in the organisation of exhibitions is hardly a secret, conventional histories have not adequately explained the extent to which their ideas informed the tone and content of the exhibitions. But these ideas surely

\(^5\) Chevalier, "Introduction," v.
\(^6\) Chevalier, "Introduction," vii.
did inform the Exhibition of 1867. The defining features of the Exhibition—its celebration of harmony among classes and among nations, its reverence for technological and industrial progress, its efforts to portray art and industry as indissolubly connected—cannot be understood without taking into account their roots in utopian and religious currents of thought. As Chevalier himself recognised, these features were present in earlier exhibitions, but they were most prominent in 1867. With the Exhibition of 1867, the utopian and religious elements buried in the culture of modernity were fleetingly exposed in the full light of day. This paper, then, is an archaeology of that now-buried modernity.8

Such an approach both draws upon and parts ways with the existing body of scholarship on exhibitions and the mass culture of the nineteenth century. The scholarly literature on exhibitions, which has grown to be quite vast, has almost without exception portrayed them as markers of “modernity.” Thus, they have been described as “emblems of progress” and “avatars” of “industrial society.”9 Historians have focussed on themes such as the role exhibitions played in propagating faith in technology, their importance for the emergence of both mass entertainment and consumerism, and their influence on the development of artistic modernism.10 Studies of this sort have shed much light on the

8 On the notion of exhibitions as “a site for a scholarly archaeology of modernity,” see Brain, Going to the Fair, 18.
historical importance of exhibitions, but they have often advanced a rather one-sided understanding of the concept of modernity, believing, with varying degrees of conviction, in what David Harvey has identified as the "myth of modernity," the notion that modernity "constitutes a radical break with the past." This has produced interpretations of universal exhibitions—and perhaps of nineteenth-century culture more generally—that sometimes lean towards the reductive and the teleological, neglecting the extent to which the modernity on display in these events contained within it elements that do not fit standard definitions of "modernity" inherited from the Enlightenment.

We can see this distortion quite clearly in the way historians have treated an aspect of the exhibitions that is at the heart of this study, the leading role of Saint-Simonians in the French exhibitions. To a large extent, the way historians have treated this issue has been shaped by larger debates about the legacy of Saint-Simonianism in the France of the Second Empire. Saint-Simonianism was an unusual movement that defies classification according to our contemporary political taxonomies. It is usually described as a form of "utopian socialism" but it was based more on hierarchy than equality; it combined a love of technology and science with pronounced strains of romanticism and religiosity. This diversity (or perhaps incoherency) has led historians to interpret the movement variously as "a chapter in the intellectual history of totalitarianism," as the source of a "doctrine of hope," as "the birth of technocracy," and as much else as well. There is, simply put, no agreed upon idea of what Saint-Simonianism was or how it should be interpreted. Things get even

murkier if one attempts to move beyond the group itself to look at its legacy under the Second Empire. The undeniable presence of many one-time Saint-Simonians among the governmental and business elites of the Second Empire has often led historians to argue that Saint-Simonian ideology was a major shaping force in the period. As Barrie Ratcliffe has argued, this interpretation is, in part, a myth inherited from nineteenth-century critics of the imperial regime who used the chimera of a Saint-Simonian cabal behind the scenes as a polemical weapon against the regime.\footnote{Barrie M. Ratcliffe, "Saint-Simonianism," in William E. Echard, ed., \textit{Historical Dictionary of the French Second Empire, 1852-1970} (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 595.} Moreover, the heterogeneous nature of Saint-Simonian doctrine has always led people of wildly different political persuasions to treat the movement as either an ally or a foil, depending on the circumstances. Thus, interpretations of Saint-Simonianism have been, and to some extent still are, intertwined with messy political disputes, and the tendentiousness of much of the literature has stood in the way of any careful understanding of Saint-Simonianism’s place in French thought and culture.\footnote{On this, see Picon, \textit{Les saint-simoniens}, 8-9.}

This interpretative confusion has been especially detrimental with regard to the religious dimension of Saint-Simonianism. As Antoine Picon has recently argued, the Saint-Simonians’ religiosity is inseparable from the more practical and down-to-earth aspects of their thought.\footnote{Picon, \textit{Les saint-simoniens}, 24.} However, many studies of the Saint-Simonians have focused on the political, social, and technical dimensions of their thought, and, when faced with the troubling presence of religiosity, they have tended to downplay it or to see it as some kind of inconsequential rhetorical device. A prime example of this approach is Robert Carlisle who acknowledges that the Saint-Simonians’ "romanticism was the essential condition of their success," but then asserts that "the foundations of their thought were systematic, rational,
pragmatic, inclusive, and inextricably mortised.” Taken together, the interpretative difficulties inherent in Saint-Simonianism have produced a body of scholarship that is regrettably unhelpful with regard to the issues that concern cultural historians.

The shortcomings of the historiography of Saint-Simonianism are, unfortunately, reflected in the historiography of exhibitions. It is no secret that Saint-Simonians were prominent in the exhibition movement, but the full significance of this fact has generally not been appreciated. In a sense, the standard interpretation of Saint-Simonian involvement in the exhibitions was established more than sixty years ago by Walter Benjamin when he remarked, “the Saint-Simonians, who envision the industrialization of the earth, take up the idea of world exhibitions.” While it is certainly true that the Saint-Simonians envisioned the industrialisation of the earth, they also envisioned much else as well—such as messianic religion and a society based on association, for instance. Much like the literature on Saint-Simonianism itself, the literature on exhibitions tends to overlook the religious element of Saint-Simonianism, focussing instead on themes that fit more easily with standard notions of modernity. Thus, for example, Paul Greenhalgh sees Saint-Simonian influence in the fact that the 1867 Exhibition “projected a notion of society as a beautifully tuned machine capable of resolving conflicts and harnessing the world to its own ends,” and Richard Mandell sees it in the Exhibition’s encyclopaedic nature and its heavy focus on labour, but neither considers the ways in which the religious dimension of Saint-Simonianism may have been manifested in the Exhibition. A similar kind of oversight can be seen in the way historians have treated the Saint-Simonians’ “socialism.” Again, the standard interpretation can be traced back to

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16 Carlisle, Proffered Crown, 1.
18 Greenhalgh, Ephemeral Vistas, 35; Mandell, Paris 1900, 11-13.
Walter Benjamin, according to whom, "the Saint-Simonians anticipated the development of the global economy, but not the class struggle. Next to their active participation in industrial and commercial enterprises around the middle of the century stands their helplessness on all questions concerning the proletariat."\(^{19}\) The Saint-Simonians did, in fact, concern themselves with questions of class struggle, although their understanding of these questions differed greatly from that of Marxists, and their doctrine was characterized by an uneasy combination of association and hierarchy. In short, when it comes to Saint-Simonian involvement in French exhibitions, the existing literature on exhibitions has not adequately dealt with the peculiar nature of Saint-Simonianism, a movement that does not fit easily into standard political and intellectual categories. Moreover, the literature has hardly dealt at all with the related issues raised by Frédéric Le Play's involvement with the exhibitions. Almost all the authors who mention him describe him as a Saint-Simonian, which is a label he surely would have rejected.\(^{20}\) Le Play's Catholic social reform movement had many similarities with Saint-Simonianism but also many differences, and a full understanding of the Exhibition of 1867 requires a more nuanced approach to those similarities and differences.\(^{21}\)

A major breakthrough, for both the historiography of Saint-Simonianism and the historiography of exhibitions, can be found in Antoine Picon's recently published book *Les saint-simoniens: raison, imaginaire et utopie*. In this book, Picon offers a much-needed reinterpretation of Saint-Simonianism that adequately accounts for the movement's religiosity and, more importantly, sees that religiosity as an example of "all that modernity

\(^{19}\) Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 7.
\(^{21}\) One of the few studies that looks at the influence of Le Play's Catholicism on exhibitions is one of the oldest, Raymond Isay's *Panorama des Expositions universelles*, 88-98.
owes to the quest for transcendence." Picon also carefully traces the legacy of Saint-Simonianism after the movement dissolved in the 1830s, looking at its influence on social and political thought, mass culture, industrialisation, and much else. In a brief section on international exhibitions, Picon addresses the extent of Saint-Simonian influence on these exhibitions in a way that makes up for many of the blind spots in the earlier historiography. His book, however, is very much a book about Saint-Simonianism as such, and Picon is only interested in the exhibitions insofar as they tell him something about Saint-Simonianism. This leads to a rather one-sided reading of the exhibitions as virtual embodiments of Saint-Simonian doctrine, with very little attention paid to the other factors that shaped the culture of exhibitions; the role of Le Play, for instance, is entirely overlooked. In reality there is no unbroken line that leads from the Saint-Simonianism of the 1830s to the exhibitions of the Second Empire, and the Exhibition was shaped by diverse and often competing interests. Thus, it is not a question of trying to locate the influence of Saint-Simonianism on exhibitions so much as it is a question of identifying the larger field of discourse that shaped the exhibitions, the Saint-Simonians, and Le Play.

This, then, is the task of this paper. It is my contention that the Exhibition cannot be understood without taking into account the extent to which it was informed by religious and utopian thought. Clearly the presence of so many Saint-Simonians among those responsible for the Exhibition is extremely important, but it is only one piece of the puzzle. I will argue that the religious and utopian dimension of the Exhibition of 1867 should be seen not as an aberration—as some kind of Saint-Simonian curiosity that has long since become irrelevant—but as a highly significant instance of a powerful current within the culture of modernity, a current that deserves more attention than it has received from historians.

To begin, I will trace the development of religious utopianism in the thought of Michel Chevalier and Frédéric Le Play, the two individuals who play the largest roles in this story. Secondly, I will look at how this utopia was represented in the Exhibition of 1867. Thirdly and finally, I will turn to a consideration of how the Exhibition was received and debated by other contemporary thinkers.
Michel Chevalier, Frédéric Le Play, and religious utopianism

Exhibitions are collective enterprises, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to attribute authorship of them to specific individuals. Nevertheless, one need not go so far as to abandon the concept of authorship altogether; much of the responsibility for the tone and content of the Exhibition of 1867 can clearly be attributed to Frédéric Le Play and Michel Chevalier. Both men were heavily involved with universal exhibitions from the very beginning in the 1850s, with a degree of dedication that is probably unmatched by anyone else in France or elsewhere. Le Play headed the imperial commissions for the Paris exhibitions of 1855 and 1867, and organised the French delegation to the London exhibition of 1862; Chevalier chaired one of the committees in 1855, was prominent in the French delegation in 1862, and was president of the international jury in 1867. Moreover, some of the most noteworthy aspects of the Exhibitions of 1867, such as its distinctive system of classification, were in fact designed by Le Play, as will be discussed below. In his classic survey of the universal exhibitions, Raymond Isay described Le Play and Chevalier as “the two principal authors and actors” of the Second Empire exhibitions. As mentioned above, a number of people with backgrounds similar to theirs were involved with nineteenth-century exhibitions, but Le Play and Chevalier, unlike most, had significant intellectual careers outside of their involvement with exhibitions. In the words of Frank Anderson Trapp, “they were responsible for introducing an element of intellectual purpose into an occasion outwardly dedicated to conspicuous display.” Their writings thus provide us with a perhaps unique opportunity to

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24 Isay, Panorama des Expositions, 90.
situate the exhibitions discursively and to understand what the exhibitions meant for those who organised and promoted them.

Chevalier and Le Play lived strangely parallel lives, and both are examples of the kind of diverse and industrious individuals that are so emblematic of the nineteenth century. Chevalier was born in Limoges in 1806 and went on to become a brilliant student at two of the most prestigious grandes écoles in Paris, the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole des Mines, from which he graduated in 1829.26 Shortly after leaving school, he became deeply involved with the Saint-Simonian movement and from 1830 to 1832 he edited the Saint-Simonian journal *Le Globe*. Along with the rest of the Saint-Simonian leadership he was arrested on charges of public immorality and was imprisoned from December 1832 to August 1833; during this imprisonment Chevalier broke off relations with Prosper Enfantin, the leader of the Saint-Simonians. Upon his release he set about pursuing a career more in line with what one would expect from an enterprising polytechnicien, conducting government-sponsored economic research and publishing the results in a series of well received monographs. Based on these writings he was awarded the chair in political economy at the Collège de France in 1840, when he was just 34 years old. In 1848, he was briefly suspended from the Collège for criticizing the Provisional Government of the Second Republic, and after the coup d’état of December 1851 he became a strong supporter of the Empire. Louis Napoleon returned the favour by naming him to the Conseil d’État, and from this position he was able to exert considerable influence on imperial economic policy. In this connection, one of his most important contributions was the negotiation in 1860 of the Cobden-Chevalier

treaty, which lowered trade tariffs between France and Britain. A lifelong pacifist, he was the only senator to vote against the war with Prussia in 1870. After that disastrous war and the collapse of the Empire, Chevalier withdrew from politics, though he continued to write and to advocate for various causes, including his pet project of digging a train tunnel from France to England, until his death in 1879.

Like Chevalier, Le Play was also born in 1806 and studied at the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole des Mines in the 1820s; he graduated from the latter with the highest honours the school had ever awarded. Like Chevalier, Le Play also made the transition from engineering to social science. And like Chevalier, Le Play rose to political prominence under the Second Empire and was appointed to the Conseil d'Etat. Unlike Chevalier, he never joined the Saint-Simonian movement, though he was something of a fellow-traveller and his thought was shaped by it to a large degree. He shared the Saint-Simonians' faith in scientific solutions for social problems, but he saw the Saint-Simonians as too romantic and unscientific; he strove to be a pure empiricist and is usually seen as an early pioneer of empirical sociology. In works such as Les Ouvriers européens (1855), La Réforme sociale en France (1864), and L'Organisation du travail (1870) he argued for the need to overcome the conflict and immorality brought about by the rise of industrial capitalist society. The key to this overcoming, according to Le Play, was a restoration of religious beliefs, combined with

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27 On this treaty, see H.N. Boon, Rêve et réalité dans l'œuvre économique et sociale de Napoléon III (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1936), 129-43.
29 The precise nature of Le Play's relationship with Saint-Simonianism is an open question. He was a close friend of many prominent Saint-Simonians, including Chevalier and Jean Reynaud, and he collaborated with them on various projects. He was never an active member of the sect, but in a letter written to Chevalier in 1832 he referred to the Saint-Simonian newspaper Le Globe as “my daily nourishment” and to its doctrine as “our faith.” See Brooke, Le Play, 166-67, n. 11.
sound social policies based on the findings of rigorous social science; these enthusiasms have led to his reputation as the father of French social Catholicism. Unhappy about his limited influence on the policies of the Second Empire—the Conseil d’État debated only one piece of legislation based on his research, and this legislation was never passed—in 1856 he founded the Société des études pratiques d’économie sociale to publicize his doctrine. Le Play’s political career, like Chevalier’s, came to an abrupt end with the fall of the Empire; he even went so far as to resign from the senate because it became elective. He continued to write until his death in 1882, becoming increasingly cranky and conservative, and earning a reputation for being a reactionary ideologue.

Chevalier’s philosophy is scattered throughout his articles and monographs, while Le Play’s is laid out systematically in La Réforme sociale en France, a three-volume summa of his social philosophy as it existed during the Second Empire. Their thought differed significantly, but they shared many fundamental similarities, especially with regard to the role of religion. Interestingly, while Le Play is universally recognised as a religious thinker, the importance of religiosity in Chevalier’s thought has without exception been overlooked or downplayed by the small number of historians who have written about him. But his writing clearly reveals a pronounced strain of religiosity that persisted from his early Saint-Simonian days until his later mature career. Coming from different perspectives, and with different orientations, Chevalier and Le Play participated in shaping a shared worldview in which religiosity underpinned a desire for social harmony, a desire for world peace and harmony among nations, and a belief in industry as a sort of divine mission.

30 See, for example, Breton, “Michel Chevalier,” 249; Duroselle, “Michel Chevalier saint-simonien,” 266; Ratcliffe, “Chevalier,” 90; Jean Walch, Michel Chevalier, économiste saint-simonien, 1806-1879 (Paris: Vrin, 1975), 7. These authors all argue that Chevalier was never much interested in the religious aspects of Saint-Simonianism when he was a member of the sect, and that he became even less interested later in life.
Being a political economist and not a theologian, Chevalier did not provide detailed explanations of his religious beliefs, which seem to have been shaped by syncretic borrowings from Saint-Simonianism and Christianity. Perhaps the closest he ever came to explicating his theology was an 1838 defence of Saint-Simon published in the *Journal des débats*. In this piece, Chevalier argued that Saint-Simon’s “last word (*le Nouveau Christianisme*) was a reminder of the fecundity of Christianity in general and of Catholicism in particular,” and he endorsed what he saw as Saint-Simon’s take on religion: “True Christianity must make men happy, not only in heaven, but also on earth.” This rather worldly form of religiosity informed the themes that appear throughout Chevalier’s many writings. One of the largest of these themes was the theme of social harmony through religion, which can be seen most clearly in two papers he wrote in 1848 and 1849 for the *Journal des économistes*, both of which were subsequently republished as pamphlets. In one of these, entitled *L'Economie politique et le socialisme*, he declared that “man has obligations toward himself and toward his family; but it is the ABC of morality that he also has obligations toward his homeland and toward the entire human family.” We have these obligations, according to Chevalier, because of our shared membership in God’s flock: “it is for this reason that religion is not only sublime, it is a social necessity.... For religion fashions us, in the name of God himself, to love all our duties.” In other words, religion is absolutely necessary for maintaining harmony in modern society because it justifies economic stratification by fashioning everyone to love his or her duties and it simultaneously defuses class conflict by emphasising the moral bond that exists between all of humankind.

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This theme received further elaboration in another of Chevalier’s papers. *La Liberté du travail*, which was published in January of 1848, was intended primarily as a vindication of competition and self-interest and as a critique of socialist doctrine. The “liberté du travail” that he advocated consisted of two components: “libre concurrence,” in which “everyone takes on the profession that suits him, makes what he wants, by the processes of his choice,” and “liberté du commerce,” which he defined as a state in which “you have the right to go and get, in any part of the world, the materials and instruments of your industry, and to exchange at your will the products of your labour for other products that you are free to bring back to your country.” In Chevalier’s view, France had made great strides toward the freedom of labour “by the abolition of corporations and by the inauguration of competition,” which had elevated French industry “to a high degree of splendour.” Within weeks of the publication of these words, the Provisional Government of the Second Republic would institute labour policies of a very different kind, guaranteeing the right to labour, establishing “National Workshops” for the unemployed, and seeking to regulate the trades along corporative lines. Chevalier bitterly attacked these policies, and because of this he briefly lost his chair at the Collège de France. But in January of 1848 nothing stood in the way of his free-market optimism. For the most part, his argument was the standard argument of classical liberalism that self-interest is the motor of all economic growth, and that without it there would be no wealth creation. But he parted ways with many liberals by arguing that self-interest must be tempered with solidarity, fraternity, and charity, which he called “the essence of religion.” He then claimed,

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political economy thus supposes the simultaneous existence of competition and Christian sentiment, which you can call association or charity, as you please. These are not two antagonistic principles; they are two forces that work together towards the constitution of society.  

As these passages indicate, religious sentiment lay at the very heart of Chevalier's economic doctrine and social philosophy. It is only because religious sentiment—however vaguely defined—is so good at maintaining social harmony, according to Chevalier, that we can have a socio-economic order that is based on self-interest and competition; in other words, religion makes modern industrial capitalism possible.

The same notion of religion as a stabilizing element and a guarantor of harmony informed Chevalier's ideas about international relations. As stated earlier, Chevalier was a lifelong pacifist, and the theme of putting an end to warfare and conflict crops up continually in his writings. In one of his early Saint-Simonian tracts, Comment il serait possible d'améliorer prodigieusement le sort des nations (1832) he advocated the construction of railways as a means to bring about cooperation and peace among European nations: by facilitating trade and communications, railways would increase understanding and interdependence between those nations and would thus prevent war. With a suggestive use of language, Chevalier declared, “the adoption of this system [of railways] would be the consecration of world peace.” Chevalier continued throughout his life to be an advocate of international trade and communication, and the network of railways that he advocated in 1832—the famous “Mediterranean system”—was roughly the same as the system France

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36 Chevalier, Liberté du travail, 6.
37 Michel Chevalier, Comment il serait possible d'améliorer prodigieusement le sort des nations (Paris: Everat, 1832), 1-2.
38 Chevalier, Sort des nations, 4.
eventually built. In *La Liberté du travail*, he again took up the theme of international rapprochement through trade and industry, and made the religious dimension more explicit, arguing that the motivation behind the coming together of the nations of the world is “on a larger scale, the same feeling of human brotherhood that I invoked earlier.” Just as religion can prevent class conflict by making us all aware of our shared membership in the human family and of our duties towards our “brothers,” so too can it prevent conflict between nations. The two harmonies—harmony within the nation and harmony between different nations—are governed by the same principle. What all of this suggests is that Chevalier’s commitments to free trade and large-scale public works projects—commitments that had a significant impact on European economic history—emerged not only from the allegedly rational principles of economic theory but also from currents of utopian religiosity.

The third religious theme running throughout Chevalier’s work has to do with his thoughts about the divine nature of modern industry. Reverence for industry was, of course, widespread in nineteenth-century Europe. The rapid rise of new manufacturing techniques, machinery, and technology made a profound impression on contemporaries, and many saw great promise in the new industrial society. It is important, too, that the very term “industry” underwent an important semantic shift in the nineteenth century, as William Sewell has observed. In the eighteenth century, industry “meant diligence or assiduousness; it referred to a quality of human effort,” but over the course of the nineteenth century it came to refer “primarily to a set of institutions and operations whose function is the production of goods.” That a word originally associated with virtuous human behaviour came to be applied to an economic arrangement speaks volumes about contemporaries’ high esteem for

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39 On this, see Carlisle, *Proffered Crown*, 196-203.
that economic arrangement. But if reverence for industry was common in the nineteenth century, Chevalier was especially reverent, and quite literally so, as his respect for industry was predicated on religious assumptions. In *La Liberté du travail*, after asserting that the "most respected traditions" all teach that the brotherhood of man is at the origin of humankind, he offered this coda:

Religious traditions often place in the past what should serve as a goal for the future. The moment seems to have arrived when we must exclaim: God wants it! The most marvellous inventions are making distances disappear, and are causing men of the most distant climates to treat each other as friends, to renounce their prejudices and their hatreds, to throw themselves into each other's arms. Mountains once raised insurmountable barriers between territories; man's genius is piercing them one by one. The sea, which once separated regions, now brings them together.... Everyday a new discovery binds states closer together.\(^{42}\)

This passage is perhaps the best summary of Chevalier's creed: industrialists are bringing the world together through technological progress; in so doing they are helping to actualise the brotherhood of men, and are thus doing God's work on earth.

These views led Chevalier to an interesting take on the history of class struggle. In another text written in the revolutionary year of 1848, a book entitled *Lettres sur l'organisation du travail, ou études sur les principales causes de la misère et sur les moyens proposés pour y remédier*, Chevalier discussed the notion of class struggle at some length. The book was intended as a rebuttal of the famous tract *Organisation du travail* by the socialist Louis Blanc, which was first published in 1839 as a series of articles and subsequently reissued in pamphlet form many times throughout the 1840s. In this tract, Blanc, who was one of the foremost socialist leaders of the time and who came to play a large role in the Provisional Government of 1848, argued that the competitive system of free

labour markets and commodity markets, which Chevalier saw as the key to economic success, was in fact the cause of the poverty and misery of the working classes, as it drove down wages and created instability. The solution, for Blanc, lay in a new “organisation of labour.” In Blanc’s scheme, workers, organised into “social workshops” and aided by state regulation and subsidies, would cooperatively control the means of production. Thus, the workers would retain the profits of their labour, rather than seeing those profits end up in the hands of bourgeois employers.\(^{43}\) Crucial to this socialist doctrine was the notion that the working class was the only productive class in society. As William Sewell has shown, the idea that the workers, whose labour produced all the wealth in society, should be considered the “sovereign people” and the correlative idea that the bourgeoisie was a class of idle expropriators of national wealth, analogous to the aristocracy of the Old Regime, had become “commonplaces of socialist discourse in the 1830s.”\(^{44}\) The political programme that followed from these assumptions was the one that Blanc proposed in *Organisation du travail* and tried to implement during his stint in the Provisional Government: workers’ control of the economy and of politics. Chevalier agreed with this analysis up to a point, but he came to very different conclusions about which class was the productive one. Like Blanc, he praised the abolition of the nobility as a result of the revolution, but he attacked the socialists who would go one step further by doing away with the bourgeoisie and initiating a proletarian society. While the abolition of the useless nobility was a good thing, in Chevalier’s view, the abolition of the bourgeoisie, the class that he saw industrialising the globe just as God wanted it, would be a disaster. “I know of only one way to do away with the bourgeoisie,” wrote Chevalier, “that is to do away with capital, with property, with enlightenment; but it seems to


me that we would be doing away with civilisation and consequently with the future of the workers.” From this, he concluded that “thus we must not do away with the bourgeoisie; we must spread it: it must include everyday a new portion of the population.” This vision of a bourgeois ascendency in saecula saeculorum—proposed as an alternative to the revolutionary doctrines of 1848 and advanced with significant consequences under the Second Empire—was the logical product of Chevalier’s religiously derived socio-economic doctrine.

Le Play’s thought on these issues was less esoteric and more conventionally religious, but it shared many of the same preoccupations. Although he is often remembered as a defender of agriculture and all things traditional and provincial, when he wrote La Réforme sociale, Le Play shared Chevalier’s notion that religion and industry should go hand in hand. In the chapter devoted to the subject of religion he asserted,

In all ages of history, from the prosperities of ancient Egypt to those of Christendom, we have noticed that the peoples that are penetrated by the firmest belief in God and in the afterlife have always risen rapidly above others by virtue and talent, as much as by power and wealth.

One of the reasons why religion has this salutary effect, according to Le Play is that it makes a virtue out of work. Alluding to the sixth commandment and the prescription in Genesis that man must toil for his food, Le Play argued that the industrial work that “daily transforms the surface of our planet” is “the obvious demonstration of the legitimate power that man

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45 Michel Chevalier, Lettres sur l’organisation du travail, ou études sur les principales causes de la misère et sur les moyens proposés pour y remédier (Paris: Capelle, 1848), 159.
46 Chevalier, Organisation du travail, 160.
47 Frédéric Le Play, La Réforme sociale en France, déduite de l’observation comparée des peuples européens, 5th ed. (Tours: Alfred Mame et Fils, 1874), 1:105-06.
acquires in submitting to the great precepts of the Holy Book." Ultimately, however, "the supreme goal of work is virtue and not wealth." This last pronouncement is a formulation that Chevalier, whose concerns were worldlier, did not agree with. The principle that animates Le Play’s argument, however, is remarkably similar to Chevalier’s argument that “religion fashions us, in the name of God himself, to love all our duties.” Both thinkers shared a belief that, at the most basic level, religion is necessary for the existence of modern industrial society.

Even more than Chevalier, Le Play was obsessed with creating social harmony, which he defined as the “usual sentiment in a state of Prosperity, indicated above all by agreement between Masters and Servants.” Le Play was emphatically not a socialist, though; like Chevalier, he envisioned a hierarchically stratified society in which the legitimacy of the hierarchy was accepted by all and in which good relations prevailed between the strata. Echoing Chevalier, Le Play thought it necessary to balance social harmony with competition, which he saw as the engine of prosperity and as an “eternal law” of economics and society. Competition, however, must be tempered with the sentiment of harmony that exists “in every State where social peace is based on moral order.” In other words, prosperity would only be possible if competition were balanced with social harmony, and social harmony would only be possible if Le Play’s programme of Catholic moral reform were adopted. Because Le Play was primarily concerned with the moral regeneration of the French nation, not international relations, he was less inclined than Chevalier to extend these ideas to cover harmony among

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48 Le Play, Réforme sociale, 2:8.
49 Le Play, Réforme sociale, 2:12.
50 In La Liberté du travail, Chevalier had argued the exact opposite, that the goal of labour is the satisfaction of man’s needs. See Chevalier, Liberté du travail, 10.
51 Le Play, Réforme sociale, 1:lxvii.
52 Le Play, Réforme sociale, 2:497.
53 Le Play, Réforme sociale, 2:491.
nations, although he was pacifist and in *La Réforme sociale* he expressed strong criticism of the excessive competition between nations engendered by nineteenth-century nationalism. On the subject of harmony between the classes, however, Le Play firmly believed that this harmony was a necessary counterpoint to capitalist competition, and that it could only be achieved through religious moral reform.

There were, of course, major differences between Le Play and Chevalier. Le Play’s religiosity was a moralistic Catholicism fixated on the Old Testament, while Chevalier’s was a kind of ill-defined deism tinged with Saint-Simonianism; Le Play was often a defender of traditional peasant values, while Chevalier was an unsentimental apologist for the industrial bourgeoisie. These differences only make it all the more interesting that both thinkers shared so much in their thinking about social harmony and the divinity of industry and labour. It is worth stressing that Chevalier and Le Play were not the only people in nineteenth-century France advancing these kinds of ideas. In his study of technology and Catholic thought in modern France, Michel Lagrée identifies two dominant strains of thought about technology among nineteenth-century Catholic thinkers, both of which were heavily utopian: the "passeiste and neomedieval utopia" of those thinkers opposed to technology and industry, and the "futurist and optimist utopia of an industrial world enlightened and blessed by Christianity." This dichotomy is probably too rigid to accommodate a complex and singular thinker like Le Play, but it does give a sense of the wide range of possible responses to technology and industrialisation among religious thinkers. Lagrée argues that much of the pro-technology Catholic thought of the nineteenth-century reveals the "diffuse influence of Saint-Simonianism," and suggests "Catholic Saint-Simonianism" as a possible label for this

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thought. One could just as easily suggest “Saint-Simonian Catholicism”—the point is that in nineteenth-century France there existed a broadly religious discourse about technology and industry, in which both Chevalier and Le Play were participating.

Another current that informed this discourse was, interestingly enough, French socialist doctrine. Edward Berenson has argued that the socialist movement in nineteenth-century France was sustained by religious thought, a fact that has often been obscured by the later dominance of secular Marxian socialism. Many nineteenth-century socialists found inspiration in the apparent fraternity and democracy of early Christianity, before it was perverted by the church hierarchy, and they saw socialism as the fulfilment of Christian moral teachings. Many socialists also saw in Christianity a glorification of labour and labourers. In the words of one worker-poet of the 1840s and 1850s who called Christ the “divine proletarian,” it is through labour that “man becomes dearer to God each day.”

Much of the popularity of the socialists, according to Berenson, can be attributed to their ability to articulate a political and economic doctrine that resonated with the popular religiosity of the French populace. The beliefs of the socialists were very similar to the beliefs about social harmony and the spirituality of industry espoused by Chevalier and Le Play. But where the socialists drew from these beliefs a politics of proletarian democracy, Chevalier and Le Play drew a politics of bourgeois hierarchy. Just as Catholic thought could lead some thinkers to celebrate modern industry and others to denounce it, so too religious ideas about the brotherhood of man and the spirituality of labour could lead to either utopian socialism or

56 Lagrée, Bénédiction de Prométhée, 45-51.
57 Charles Poncy, quoted in Sewell, Work and Revolution, 239.
utopian capitalism. While the former phenomenon has been well analysed by historians, the latter has been overlooked. But as we shall see, the utopian capitalism of Chevalier and Le Play had considerable resonance in the mid nineteenth century, especially after the cataclysmic failure of the revolutions of 1848 and the apparent economic success of the Second Empire in the 1850s and 1860s.

It must be noted that both thinkers strongly rejected the label of "utopian" that I am seeking to apply to them here, as they saw themselves as strict realists. Their social philosophies, however, envisioned a perfect society, prosperous and free of conflict, created through voluntaristic action, which is virtually a dictionary definition of political utopianism. In his classic text, *Ideology and Utopia*, Karl Mannheim argues that "a state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs"; specifically, according to Mannheim, utopian mentalities are those "which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time." For Le Play and Chevalier, what made their thought incongruous with reality was religiosity; the perfection of society could only be achieved, they thought, through a new understanding of the role of religion in society. Thus, they were not merely utopian and religious; they were utopian because they were religious. Moreover, Chevalier's supercharged optimism is typical of a paradox that is a hallmark of utopian historical consciousness: exhortations to work for the creation of a perfect society are uneasily combined with the conviction that society is inexorably heading towards perfection.

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59 The concept of "utopian capitalism" has been proposed, in passing, by Matthew Truesdell in his *Spectacular Politics*, 103. Although Truesdell does not explore the nature of this phenomenon, nor explain its implications, it is my contention that it can tell us much about nineteenth-century French thought and culture.

anyhow. Utopian projects are, by definition, projects that were never realised—had they been realised, we today would not be calling them utopian. The utopianism of Le Play and Chevalier is obviously not an exception to this; they never managed to shatter the prevailing order of things, nor did they succeed in establishing a harmonious society. That they did not succeed in totally reordering reality does not mean, however, that they had no effect on reality. Like all utopias, theirs had wide-ranging repercussions on society. In *Le réel de l'utopie*, Michèle Riot-Sarcey argues that the “historicity of utopias” is located in “the concrete effects that they caused” in the social world. For Riot-Sarcey, these constitute the “real of utopia.” Building on Riot-Sarcey’s argument, Antoine Picon argues that, “to the real of utopia, it is useful to add the utopian dimension of reality, a reality largely conditioned by the forward march of science and technology.” In other words, utopianism was a response to the particular conjuncture of the nineteenth century, which was characterized by the massive upheavals of the industrial revolution. The historian of utopias, then, should be focused on the interaction between text and context. To undertake this level of analysis, we must now turn to the Universal Exhibition of 1867.

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61 The conception of utopia as a state towards which society is inexorably progressing was deeply embedded in nineteenth-century utopian discourse, even as this discourse was arguing for the necessity of shattering existing societal arrangements. On this, see Picon, *Les saint-simoniens*, 25, 171. For a wide-ranging discussion of the features of utopian discourse, see Maurice de Gandillac and Catherine Piron, eds., *Le discours utopique* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1978).

62 Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *Le réel de l'utopie: Essai sur le politique au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 261. Phillip E. Wegner makes a parallel argument for literary utopias: “They are not real in that they portray actual places in the world; rather, they are real . . . in that they have material, pedagogical, and ultimately political effects, shaping the ways people understand and, as a consequence, act in their worlds.” Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), xvi.

Exhibiting utopia

The interest of religious utopians in exhibitions can be explained, to a large degree, by the utopianism inherent in the exhibitions themselves. Nineteenth-century exhibitions were motivated by the inescapably utopian principle that social change, or even social perfection, could be produced by representations themselves. Thus, in addition to being seen as signs of progress, these exhibitions were often seen as bearers of that same progress. The rapprochement of nations, the fostering of good relations between the classes, the encouragement of industry—all of this and more was often understood to be not only represented by exhibitions but also caused by them. This view of exhibitions can be seen, for instance, in the passage from the official guidebook quoted earlier, in which exhibitions are said to be “the first steps” in “the progress of industry that has left an indelible mark on our century.”

In his study of the Saint-Simonians, Picon argues that the Saint-Simonians and other utopian movements of the nineteenth century, with their theatricality, their flair for propaganda, and their obsession with recording the news that they themselves were making, “embody better than others the new regime of relations between representations and practices of which nineteenth-century Paris was the bearer, a regime marked by the growing importance of publicity in all its forms.” Picon goes so far as to argue that this is “the principal contribution of utopia to the genesis of modernity.” Exhibitions, gargantuan spectacles that were both representative and constitutive of the new industrial order, can be seen as the epitome of this “new regime of relations between representations and practices.” This goes a long way toward explaining the infatuation with exhibitions among so many

64 Guide de l’exposant et du visiteur, 1-2.
65 Picon, Les saint-simoniens, 28.
veterans of utopian movements, especially Michel Chevalier, the “doctor and doctrinaire of universal expositions,” as Raymond Isay described him.\textsuperscript{66}

Not surprisingly, Chevalier did not take long to recognise the potential of universal exhibitions. In a review of the first universal exhibition, London’s Great Exhibition of 1851, he argued repeatedly that the contemporary “age is not marked by materialism” and that is in fact “more spiritualist than any of the ages which have preceded it.”\textsuperscript{67} The Exhibition was evidence of this provocative claim, according to Chevalier, insofar as it was “nothing less than the bringing together of all the nations of the earth on one ground”; this bringing together of nations was, in turn, the very fulfilment of Christianity, which “has always taught us that all men are brothers, being all Children of the same God.”\textsuperscript{68} In light of this, Chevalier condemned those “ultra-Christians, who erect themselves into a tribunal from which there is no appeal” to condemn the age for being materialistic; what they saw as materialism, Chevalier saw as “the groundwork of Christianity, and the commencement and the end of that august religion.”\textsuperscript{69} If the spiritualism of universal exhibitions went unnoticed by the “ultra-Christians” (and presumably by many others as well), Chevalier and his colleagues made every effort to make it more noticeable in 1867.

One of the most powerful expressions of the purposes of the Exhibition’s organisers in 1867 can be found in the classification system and layout of the exhibit space devised by Le Play. Classification systems were extremely important in all universal exhibitions. The classification system imposed order and structure on the diverse items being exhibited and in so doing created meaning; in this sense, exhibitions were analogues of the ambitious

\textsuperscript{66} Isay, \textit{Panorama des Expositions}, 90.
\textsuperscript{68} Chevalier, “Letters,” 562.
encyclopaedias published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{70} The classification scheme invented by Le Play in 1867 was especially ambitious: in his own words, it aimed to reproduce "in the truest and most striking form the complete picture of human industry."\textsuperscript{71}

To this end, Le Play did away with the rigid division between fine arts and industry that had characterized previous exhibitions. In his scheme, there were ten groups, all included within the same classificatory apparatus: (I) fine arts; (II) liberal arts; (III) furniture and other objects used in dwellings; (IV) clothing and other objects worn upon the person; (V) products of extractive industries, raw and manufactured; (VI) tools and processes of the "usual arts"; (VII) food; (VIII) livestock and specimens of agriculture; (IX) produce and specimens of horticulture; (X) articles specially exhibited to improve the physical and moral condition of the population. These ten groups were in turn divided into 95 classes. The spatial arrangement of these groups and classes, also devised by Le Play, was ingenious. (See figure 1.) The exhibition palace was in the form of a giant oval, with the different groups organised concentrically, starting with food in the outermost oval and going towards fine arts in the innermost. Agriculture and horticulture were exhibited outside the hall; the objects of Group X were dispersed throughout the other groups. In addition to this concentric system of classification by category, there was a simultaneous classification by nation: the products of each nation were organised along transversal alleys that extended from the centre to the periphery of the palace. Thus, one could see all the products of a given nation by walking along one of the alleys, or one could see the products of all nations within a given category by walking around the concentric ovals. The effect of this system was to stress the

\textsuperscript{70} On this, see Aimone and Olmo, \textit{Les Expositions universelles}, 22; Mandell, \textit{Paris 1900}, 11-12. For a detailed discussion of exhibition classification schemes, see Schroeder-Gudenus and Rasmussen, \textit{Fastes du progress}, 21-38; for a briefer discussion, see Brain, \textit{Going to the Fair}, 16.

\textsuperscript{71} Commission Impériale, \textit{Rapport sur l'Exposition universelle de 1867, à Paris} (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869), 16.
Figure 1. Plan of the Exhibition Palace, from François Ducuing, ed. *L’Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée* (Paris: Ch. Lahure, 1867).
overarching unity of nations and of different forms of human enterprise, a message that clearly echoes the ideas of Le Play and Chevalier.

This classification system has been much discussed and interpreted by both contemporaries and historians. The concentric arrangement, which placed industry in the outer rings and the arts in the centre, was intended to represent the hierarchy of human needs, from the physical to the intellectual and spiritual.\(^{72}\) In the words of an art critic, who was critical of this layout because it made the works of art harder to access, “Material things occupy the first ring, and each circle crossed brings you closer to the spiritual.”\(^{73}\) But the very heart of the exhibition hall was dedicated to topics not normally associated with the spiritual: a display of money (located in the central garden) and the special exhibit on the History of Labour, which was one of the star attractions of the Exhibition. Most commentators, past and present, have interpreted this as an awkward juxtaposition that messed up the grand symbolism of the exhibition’s layout.\(^{74}\) It has also been argued that the layout constituted a “downgrading” or “demotion” of the arts by allotting them a relatively small space and hiding them away amid all the industrial products.\(^{75}\) Le Play himself, though, claimed that the classification scheme “consecrated once and for all the union of fine arts and industry.”\(^{76}\) To understand the meaning of this arrangement it is necessary to look at it in the context of Le Play’s philosophy more generally.

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\(^{72}\) For Le Play’s own discussion of this, see Commission Impériale, *Rapport sur l’Exposition*, 17.


\(^{75}\) See, for example, Mainardi, *Art and Politics*, 132-33; Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics*, 113.

In *La Réforme sociale*, Le Play discussed at some length the need to balance the "*arts usuels*," which he defined as all activities having to do with "the production, successive elaboration, transport, and sale of material objects," and the "*arts libéraux,*" by which he meant the "mostly immaterial" works having to do with government, religion, justice, war, medicine, education, the fine arts, letters, and sciences. The latter, according to Le Play, are better at raising "the intellectual level of those who work," but the former "preserve them better from corruption." This is because practitioners of the "*arts usuels*" have no choice but to put in an honest day's work to earn their daily bread; thus, unlike practitioners of the "*arts libéraux,*" they do not face the temptation of idleness, corruption, and other vices that so offended Le Play's Catholic morality. The virtue-inducing "*arts usuels*" are therefore a valuable counterweight and stabiliser to the intellectually uplifting but vice-prone "*arts libéraux.*" Moreover, for Le Play the need to balance the two kinds of human endeavour was also a question of preserving and encouraging different ways of knowing. Citing the examples of agriculture and metallurgy, Le Play argued that many of the "*arts usuels*" had developed a working understanding of matter and of the natural world long before scientists, philosophers, or artists had. In Le Play's account, this understanding, developed through practical experience, laid the foundation for the experimental method in science and social science, which in turn contributed greatly to the expansion of knowledge and the improvement of society. In fact, Le Play went so far as to argue that these "*arts usuels*" had "contributed more certainly than the philosophies of antiquity, of the middle ages, and of the Renaissance to lead the human mind [*esprit*] to truth." 

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77 *Le Play, Réforme sociale*, 2:15-16.
79 *Le Play, Réforme sociale*, 2:16-21. The quotation is from page 17.
Although these arguments reflected Le Play's religious ideas about the virtue of labour and industry, they also reflected Enlightenment influences as well. As William Sewell has argued, the exalting of labour was common among Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and especially Diderot, all of whom were reacting against the Old Regime's aristocratic and traditional Catholic disdain for physical labour. In the *Encyclopédie*, for instance, Diderot had praised the "*arts mécaniques*" in terms very similar to Le Play's, arguing that labour was crucial to human happiness and defending the empirical knowledge of tradesmen and labourers. And much like Le Play, Diderot had argued that a symbiotic relationship between the "*arts mécaniques*" and the "*arts libéraux" would contribute greatly to the progress of knowledge and society.  

What is worth noting is that this line of argument, which was initially advanced as part of a secularizing Enlightenment programme, had by the nineteenth century achieved a certain level of currency among French thinkers and was very easily adapted to Le Play's religious framework.

In sum, then, for Le Play the rapprochement of the different fields of human enterprise—the liberal arts, fine arts, science, industry, agriculture—was a project that would be beneficial for all and would help to bring about the stable and harmonious society he was working to construct. Seen in this light, the Exhibition was less a downgrading or demotion of art in favour of industry than it was a call to unite and integrate the two for the benefit of society. That the whole complex was centred on the exhibits of money and the History of Labour makes perfect sense in light of the assumptions about the divinity of labour and industry shared by both Le Play and Chevalier. Work, virtuous and divinely ordained, was the organising principle around which the different fields of human enterprise could be united and social harmony assured.

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The theme of solving class problems through social harmony was expressed in other ways throughout the Exhibition as well. This heavy emphasis on workers' issues occurred in part no doubt because the ideas of Le Play and Chevalier coincided to some extent with the political ambitions of Napoleon III, who was very much concerned in this period with solving class problems and maintaining working-class support for his regime through social reform. In the words of Madeleine Rebérioux, the Exhibition's emphasis on the workers was part of the Empire's "overall policy of social seduction." The venue in which these concerns were expressed most directly was Group X, mentioned above, which included, among other things, workers' housing (a subject of particular interest for the Emperor), materials relating to the education of children and adults, and low-cost furniture and other goods. In his speech at the opening of the Exhibition, the Emperor made special mention of Group X as one of the Exhibition's most important features, and it was the subject of much praise in reviews of the exhibition. This group was not exhibited in its own gallery, but rather was dispersed throughout the other groups, reflecting the notion that social reform and the betterment of the lot of the working class required mobilizing all branches of knowledge and practice. In addition, this group, which was supposed to improve both the physical and moral conditions of the people, reveals a great deal about the perceived relationship between those two conditions. The underlying assumption was, in the words of one of the jury reports in Chevalier's edited collection, that "the progress of the physical condition of the population

81 On the "utopian" dimension of Napoleon III's politics, see David Baguley, Napoleon III and His Regime: An Extravaganza (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 181-208. On Napoleon III's social and economic policies more generally see Boon, Rêve et réalité.
is inseparable from moral progress." In other words, the material objects on display—the affordable houses, sturdy furniture, and so forth—were meant to help improve the morals of the people and in so doing help bring about social harmony. If, as Paul Rabinow has argued, "Saint-Simon's dictum that modern society would pass 'from the government of men to the administration of things' has formed a leitmotif for French reformers," then Group X at the Exhibition of 1867 is a particularly striking instance of this leitmotif. The group, and to a large extent the Exhibition as a whole, represented a blueprint for the perfection of society through the administration of things.

But it was not only objects made for the workers that were on display in Group X, it was also objects made by them. Classes 94 and 95 of Group X featured, respectively, objects manufactured by skilled tradesmen, and the tools and processes used by those skilled tradesmen. According to Le Play, he and his colleagues on the Imperial Commission devised this feature of the Exhibition because they wanted to supplement the displays of machines that were common to all exhibitions with examples of

the work of man with its perfection of taste, manual skill, and intelligent precision. It [the Imperial Commission] wanted to thus bring about useful and fertile rapprochements, reveal the worker's share in general production, and, at the moment when the machine seems about to invade all industries, demonstrate that, for some work, the hand of man can defy any mechanical competition.

We can see here a number of the key elements in the Exhibition's social politics. At the most fundamental level, this exhibit reveals the strength of the belief in the agency of representations that underpinned the Exhibition as a whole. In fact, in this case the distinction

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85 Rabinow, French Modern, 1.
86 Commission Impériale, Rapport sur l'Exposition, 86-87.
between representations and practices effectively dissolved, as industrial practices became representations, which were in turn supposed to provoke a larger programme of social practices. But what was that programme? At first glance, there is the glorification of skilled manual labour against deskillling technology, which fits in quite nicely with Le Play's religiously derived ideas about the virtue of labour. It would be a mistake, however, to read this as a reactionary attack on industrial modernity. The Gallery of Machines, after all, was the largest of all the Exhibition’s galleries, and the Exhibition as a whole was quite clearly a celebration of modern industry. The glorification of skilled manual labour was an inextricable part of this larger celebration, an insistence that for some—but by no means all—work, “the hand of man can defy any mechanical competition.” It was, again, an issue of harmony, of bringing about “rapprochements” between different kinds of workers, between the workers and the industrialists, between the working class and machines. Based on the relatively small space and the relatively small resources devoted to the exhibit of skilled manual labour, it would seem that “the worker’s share in general production” was a rather small share indeed.

This points to a conspicuous feature of the Exhibition’s class politics: although the organisers may have spoken the language of harmony and cooperation, in actual practice these tended to become authority and control. Considerable efforts were made to encourage workers to attend the Exhibition for their own edification, including the provision of cheap transportation and accommodation, and Le Play boasted that “it is one of the most striking features of the physiognomy of the Exhibition that all ranks of society were represented there.”87 The workers even had their own elected delegations at the Exhibition, which served as parallel juries of a sort. But when it came to actual power and responsibility the workers

were almost totally excluded. No workers sat on the official juries, for example, and even the much ballyhooed awards for industrial relations, which were given to industrial establishments that “have developed good harmony between people working together on the same jobs, and which have assured to the workers their material, moral, and intellectual well-being,”

were awarded by a committee made up entirely of industrialists and representatives of the government. Not surprisingly, the reports published by the workers’ delegation voiced considerable discontent about the powerlessness of the workers and about the condition of the working class more generally. That the Exhibition was partly intended to neutralize that discontent and control the workers was sometimes stated quite openly. In his jury report, Chevalier, while discussing working-class political movements that he saw as misguided, declared, “there is, in the mind of the working population, a certain number of utopias that the development of public instruction would cause to vanish”; among the things that needed to vanish, according to Chevalier, was the idea that “capital is for [the workers’ organisations] an implacable enemy.”

This blunt passage lays bare the Exhibition’s didactic and controlling intentions. What is remarkable is that in seeking to combat the alleged utopias of working-class activism, the Exhibition offered a vision of social harmony through industrial capitalism that was itself thoroughly utopian, steeped as it was in the religious optimism of Chevalier and Le Play. Indeed, within pages of his critique of the workers’ “utopias,” Chevalier declared that “religion is one of the most effective forces for the maintenance of social harmony.”

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Returning for a moment to Le Play's layout for the exhibition hall, we can see that it reveals another key feature of the Exhibition’s creed: the unity of nations. Enclosing the exhibits of all the nations in one hall radiating out from central displays of money and labour effectively represented the uniting of the world through industrial capitalism. Fittingly, Parisians dubbed the building the “Industrial Tower of Babel.” Likewise, Le Play’s classification system, which was supposed to encompass all forms of human knowledge and industry, was predicated on the assumption that all nations could be ordered and classified through a common matrix established by modern industry. Not surprisingly, given his incomparable enthusiasm for this subject, Chevalier saw this as the Exhibition’s greatest accomplishment and argued, in the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper, that this coming together of nations was “religious.” The true nature of Chevalier’s thoughts on globalism and the role of universal exhibitions was spelled out in more detail in his writings on the Great Exhibition of 1851. In this text he wrote at length about relations between eastern and western civilisation. Defining the latter as “the ensemble of Christian nations,” he offered up the following analysis:

It is in them [the western nations] that resides now incontestably the power of the human race. They are visibly invested with the empire of the present, and are the depositories of the destinies of the future. They prevail much less by military force, which has furnished to them the apparent means of subjugating the rest of the world, or of inspiring it with a salutary fear, than by the sciences and letters, and by the useful and fine arts. They prevail more especially by the grandeur of their sentiments, the nobleness and extent of their sympathies. They alone, at least the more enlightened of them, have the conviction, profound and henceforward political, that men, according to the will of God, are destined one day to constitute here below, by the progress of human institutions, a single family, and this is the foundation of their religious faith. This Exhibition itself supplies at present a proof of the bringing closer together of all the nations which compose it, of the feeling which unites them

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one to another, of the conviction they have of the unity of their interests, and of the desire which animates them to act in concert and assist each other.\textsuperscript{93}

This remarkable passage, in which the imperial project is justified on the grounds that it is helping to actualise the brotherhood of men under God, reveals what can only be described as a kind of Saint-Simonian imperialism. Of course, Chevalier distanced himself from the more brutal variants of imperial ideology according to which the nations of the east would inevitably “be reduced to servitude by those of the West” on account of their inherent weakness. “One’s soul revolts against such a prognostication,” writes Chevalier. Instead he argued for the progressive elevation of the non-western nations so that they would one day be able to join the industrial family of the West.\textsuperscript{94} We can see something of this way of thinking in the layout of the Exhibition of 1867, in which non-western nations were included within the same classifications as the western nations but given very little space, and in which colonies such as Algeria were grouped with their colonisers. Here again the Exhibition was seen not only as illustrative of this state of affairs but also as causative: one of its greatest virtues, in Chevalier’s eyes, was that it promoted and fostered the very feeling of brotherhood that would lead the western nations to embark on the project he foresaw for them.

Given that the Exhibition’s rhetoric of harmony and brotherhood was so easily joined to a programme of domination and control, it would be easy to interpret the religious utopianism of Chevalier and Le Play as little more than cynical mystification. But this would be too simplistic in my view. Both thinkers shifted their political allegiances over time, but their religiosity and their ideas about the perfectibility of society remained remarkably consistent. Chevalier never abandoned the ideals that had animated him as a young Saint-

\textsuperscript{93} Chevalier, “Letters,” 508-09.  
\textsuperscript{94} Chevalier, “Letters,” 490.
Simonian, he simply changed his ideas about how those ideals could best be actualised. Similarly, Le Play became increasingly reactionary over time, but the ideals upon which he based his politics remained the same. As Matthew Truesdell has argued, “For Chevalier and many others, the ‘utopian socialism’ of the 1830s had evolved by the 1850s into a sort of ‘utopian capitalism’. 95 Much had changed between the 1830s and the 1850s, of course, but the single most important event was undoubtedly the revolutions of 1848. Le Play had initially participated in the Provisional Government, but its failure led him to conclude that solving the social problem would require a different approach. 96 Chevalier, as we have seen, bitterly opposed the revolutionaries of 1848, and their failure seems to have left him feeling justified. This sense of justification was further bolstered by the economic expansion and modernisation that occurred during Napoleon III’s reign, as Chevalier, like many allies of the imperial regime, argued that free-market economic policies were the true guarantee of prosperity for the working class. In other words, the failure of the Second Republic and the apparent success of the Second Empire led to a wholesale transformation of utopianism. What had been a weapon of the oppositional left in the 1830s and 1840s became, in the 1850s and 1860s, a tool of the established right. Thus, for Chevalier and Le Play religion and utopia were not ideological masks for capitalism and imperialism; rather, it was their faith in the former that led them to the latter. In 1867, amid a favourable political and economic climate, they had the opportunity to put their ideas on display, and they clearly hoped that in so doing they would make a decisive intervention in public discourse and perhaps help to bring about the utopia of which they dreamed.

95 Truesdell, Spectacular Politics, 103.
Engineering utopia

Chevalier and Le Play intended to exhibit a utopia grounded in religiosity, but how this was received in the larger culture is another question altogether. To attempt an answer to that question, I wish to look at the *Etudes sur l'Exposition de 1867, ou les archives de l'industrie au XIXᵉ siècle*, a multi-volume collection of essays on the Exhibition written by “scholars, engineers, and professors from France and abroad,” edited by the prominent architect Eugène Lacroix, and published under the auspices of the *Annales du Génie civil*, an engineering journal.97 In his *Going to the Fair*, Robert Brain quotes a nineteenth-century bibliography that divided works of exhibition literature into three categories, “official publications; then works taking in the whole of the exhibition; finally monographs of all kinds.” But these divisions were highly approximate, as many texts combined elements of more than one genre. The *Etudes*—whose title page describes the contents as a “General, Encyclopaedic, Methodical, and Reasoned Description of the Current State of Arts, Sciences, Industry, and Agriculture among All Nations,” but also as a “Collection of Technical, Theoretical, Practical, and Historical Works”—are a perfect example of this kind of “generic miscegenation,” as Brain calls it. Much of the text consists of the kind of descriptive writing typical of technical-scientific literature. But along with this, the text also contains elements of so-called “panoramic literature,” which, according to Brain, “offered methodical overviews of entire fields of knowledge and modes of production, fusing instruction with recreation, and reaffirming a basic faith that nothing could escape the broad net of language.”98 This is a

perfect description of many of the essays in the Etudes, which collectively strove to encapsulate the entire Exhibition and everything it represented.

For our purposes, the Etudes are particularly important for two main reasons. First, the sheer size of this text—it filled eight volumes—as well the large number of writers who contributed to it make it one of the most significant collections of writing on the Exhibition of 1867. Second, the fact that the collection was written primarily by and for engineers and other technical experts gives it additional significance. These are the kinds of experts that Paul Rabinow has called “specific intellectuals,” a term that he borrows from Michel Foucault and uses to describe “pragmatic technicians seeking to find scientific and practical solutions to public problems.” These are figures who, in Rabinow’s words, occupy “the middle ground between high culture or science and ordinary life.” An archaeology of modernity cannot overlook the importance of specific intellectuals, least of all in France. Perhaps more so than in any other country, in France the experience of modernity has been marked by a preoccupation with a certain kind of rational planning and technical expertise. In other words, the writers and readers of the Etudes sur l’Exposition de 1867 were the kinds of people who played a privileged role in the shaping of modern France. Given that nineteenth-century exhibitions are often seen as blueprints for modern mass culture, this text represents the meeting-point of two constitutive elements of modernity: the technocratic and the mass cultural. In the meeting of the two, we can see the emergence of a discourse that is steeped in the utopian patterns of thought embodied in the Exhibition, even as it often moves to criticise these.

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99 In light of this, it is somewhat surprising that previous histories of nineteenth-century exhibitions have not paid more attention to this text. Although it is listed in virtually every bibliography of exhibition literature, no one seems to have made use of it.

100 Rabinow, French Modern, 16, 9.
A good place to begin examining this text is, appropriately enough, at the beginning. In a revealing bit of editorial positioning, the first essay in the first volume is a look at "Fine Arts and Industry at the Universal Exhibition" by one Léon-Vicotor Daguzan, a painter. Setting the tone for many of the essays to come, Daguzan sets out to convince his audience of engineers of the unity of art and industry. As we have seen, this was one of the key components of the Exhibition’s utopian rhetoric. For Daguzan, it is partly an issue of simple bottom-line considerations: he claims that the industrialist who takes an interest in art “will find there the means to increase the value of his products.” Even this is an interesting argument inasmuch as it recognises the productive capacity of representation and appearance, and is thus an example of the kind of thinking that is at the root of exhibitions as such. More significant, though, are the other arguments that Daguzan advances in support of his position. The unity of art and industry is not, in Daguzan’s view, merely a goal to be sought after, it is an inescapable fact: “Necessity created industry, and it created the plastic arts. Industry and the arts are thus members of the same family.” The necessity that created the arts is, according to Daguzan, the human need for beauty, and the “laws of harmony” require that beauty and utility be paired. “These laws of harmony are so imperious,” writes Daguzan, “that even the most practical of mechanics cannot escape them absolutely.” This is a very unusual argument to find in a text published by an engineering journal like the Annales du Génie civil. Indeed, the very fact that this journal would invite a submission from an artist is more than a little odd. As Antoine Picon has argued in his study of French Architects and

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102 According to Robert Brain, in the late nineteenth century German economists developed the concept of “exhibition value” (Ausstellungswert) to denote the productive capacity of representation itself. The lesson of exhibitions for these economists was that things gain value simply by virtue of their mode of appearance, quite apart from use-value or production cost.” Brain, Going to the Fair, 14.
Engineers in the Age of Enlightenment, in the eighteenth century, when the profession of engineering began to separate itself from that of architecture, engineers began to define their practice in terms of “utility,” with which they displaced classical architectural theory’s terms of “character,” “taste,” and “convenance.” Thus, engineering culture in France was marked by a pronounced functionalism. Moreover, Daguzan’s argument stands in stark contrast to those of the many nineteenth-century reformers for whom the unification of art and industry meant merely embellishing industrial products with the ennobling properties of art. As the passages quoted above make clear, for Daguzan, the unity of art and industry was an ontological necessity. And, although he is maddeningly vague on the specifics, he insists that the rapprochement of art and industry must involve two-way movement: “We believe that industry must take a step toward art, and that art must move closer to industry.” To understand this argument and its significance in the context of the Exhibition, we must read on.

These same issues are addressed more polemically in another essay in the collection by an “architecte-constructeur” named Lucien Puteaux, who was himself the recipient of a bronze medal for the houses he exhibited at the Exhibition. In this piece, Puteaux attacks the famous exhibition hall on account of its lack of elegance and architectural merit, and he

106 On one such reformer, Léon de Laborde, see Whitney Walton, France at the Crystal Palace: Bourgeois Taste and Artisan Manufacture in the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), 171-98. On similar reformers in Britain and America, see Julie Wosk, Breaking Frame: Technology and the Visual Arts in the Nineteenth Century (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), chs. 3-6. For a review of the Exhibition of 1867 by advocates of this kind of application of art to industry, see The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue of the Universal Exhibition (London: Virtue and Co., 1868), which claimed to “have demonstrated the MERCANTILE VALUE OF THE FINE ARTS, and [to] have shown how consistently and how honourably they may be applied to industrial operations” (27).
places the blame squarely on the “regrettable influence” of engineers in the design process. In response to this criticism, the editor of the *Etudes*, Eugène Lacroix, appended a footnote distancing the journal from Puteaux’s views and defending the engineers. Lacroix, who says he cannot “accept the idea of the artistic inferiority of our engineers,” argues that architects, of which he was one, suffer from a tendency to “sacrifice utility to form.” The task, he argues, is to solve the “double problem of form and utility,” and the best solution will likely be the product of cooperation between engineers and architects. Like Daguzan, Lacroix is adamant that form and utility, art and engineering, must exist in a state of harmony and balance. Daguzan’s “laws of harmony” are an unspoken assumption for Lacroix.

In making these arguments, Daguzan and Lacroix may have been arguing against their more narrow-minded professional contemporaries, but they were echoing the rhetoric of the Exhibition. As we have seen, the unity of art and industry, grounded in religious thinking about labour and industry, was a key element of the Exhibition’s vision of a harmonious society. In the pages of the *Etudes sur l’Exposition* we can see different but closely related ideas being expressed. For the organisers of the Exhibition it was a question of utopian beliefs about social harmony and the spiritual nature of all human productivity—about industry being “the very fulfilment of the mission given to man by the Creator,” to use Chevalier’s words again. For the *Annales du Génie civil* it was a question of professional legitimacy and good design. But from these varied agendas there emerged a distinctive discourse that challenged dominant understandings of art, industry, and relations between the two.

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In an essay on lithography, another *Etudes* contributor, an industrial chemist named D. Kaeppelin, highlighted another benefit of the union of art and industry. Lithography, which exists in the interstice between the two fields, is especially important, Kaeppelin argues, because it can “propagate at low cost the taste of the fine arts among all classes of the population.”¹¹⁰ This concern with the working classes brings us once again to the desire to prevent class conflict and create social harmony, which, as we have seen, was one of the most pressing preoccupations for the Exhibition’s organisers. On this issue, the *Etudes sur l’Exposition de 1867* shared the enthusiasm of the Exhibition organisers. The collection contains numerous essays on the objects exhibited in Group X, as well as references to the issue in other essays like the one on lithography. Generally speaking, the contributors considered the Exhibition to be a positive accomplishment in the campaign to elevate the working class while maintaining social harmony, but some important disagreements emerged as well. These are most visible in the essay on workers’ housing. The subject of workers’ housing was of special interest to Napoleon III and it is not at all surprising that it figured prominently in the Exhibition of 1867; in fact, the Emperor himself won a medal for his own models of workers’ housing. The editors of the *Annales du Génie civil* chose to publish lengthy ruminations on the subject by Alexandre Foucher de Careil, an aristocrat, literary figure, translator of Leibniz, and politician. During the Second Empire, Foucher de Careil was an opponent of the government; under the Third Republic, he became a senator of the centre-left and eventually ambassador to Austria.¹¹¹ Much of his essay in the *Etudes sur l’Exposition* consists of description and evaluation of the different examples of workers’ housing on display at the Exhibition, but he also addresses the larger social issues involved.

¹¹¹ *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, s.v. “Foucher de Careil (Louis-Alexandre).”
And, in a passage that deserves to be quoted at length, he castigated the Exhibition for its utopianism:

I was recently reading a touching homily on the Eskimos, on their life, their customs, their Christianity. I believe that the intention that dictated these pious effusions was excellent.... But how I prefer to them a page of Heine!... How I prefer to this banal Christianity degenerating into a dull optimism a bit of that biting irony that makes us see man as he is, and strips the gods of their prestige! Optimism is most often a bitter sarcasm or a self-interested flattery that cannot withstand the test of facts: sarcasm if it is the blissful optimism of the fortunate of the century who speak this language to the underprivileged, in spite of horrifying statistics, and the human products exhibited by M. Le Play and the ethnographers; a self-interested flattery if, after having agreed with the partisans of a common origin between men and apes, you offer these beautiful dreams of the pasture to the ignorant with the thought in the back of your mind that they often lead to honours and to credit and that they even lead skilful exploiters of human idolatry to the Academy or to power. But do these people think they can muffle for long the terrible truth that is already starting to see the light of day, and that they can thus lead the people with those beautiful words of social harmony and cooperation that are most often nothing but gilded lies? For those of us who cannot be suspected, in the sincerity of our scientific studies, of either flattery or sarcasm, we are content to say to our optimists, to these apostles of the gospel of Le Play, to these new redeemers of men: “Before making men into gods, nourish and house them like men.” Now, the statistics of the Exhibition and the ethnographic research to which we have dedicated ourselves, permit us to establish that on one third of the globe, they are still housed like apes or even like beavers, to say nothing of those who, because of their state, are condemned to rummage like moles. This is the truth testified to by the history of housing and confirmed by the evidence at the Universal Exhibition of 1867, when one does not content oneself with the vain superficiality or the veneer of luxury and elegance with which modern society adorns itself.\(^{112}\)

Here Foucher de Careil would seem to be offering one of the most strident—if somewhat obscure—attacks on the utopian ideals of the Exhibition in any of the contemporary literature. And, most importantly, it displays an awareness of the religious dimension of that utopianism.

Things get more complicated, however, if one compares this stinging passage with one that occurs two pages earlier:

Man, and especially the man of the first social strata that we so inappropriately call the last, takes after the artist and the child. In this dual capacity, he is susceptible to illusions. You who wish to house him and to lead him to well being, must not deprive him of the *illusion* of the home, symbol of the family. Add to this, if you can, the illusion of the fields. Very little is required to give rise to this illusion or to reawaken it when it is sleeping. Three or four rows of lettuce, a stock of vine climbing the length of the wall, some herbs, a goat for the wealthier ones: here is that little world of rural appearance that it is so easy to reproduce even today on the edges of cities.\(^\text{113}\)

In this paragraph, Foucher de Careil sounds very much like the utopians he is attacking. The notion that the working classes are the first social strata, not the last; the notion that workers take after both children and artists—these are both ideas that would be at home in the writings of Chevalier or Le Play. Moreover, the emphasis on the power of illusion mirrors the fundamental premise of exhibitions: that representations in and of themselves can effect social change. How are we to square this with Foucher’s later attack on the misguided “optimists” who offer nothing but “dreams” and “gilded lies”?

A hint of an answer can be found at the end of Foucher’s essay. After a discussion of the qualities that make workers’ housing successful, he concludes that good workers’ housing “has the most salutary influence on the character of the inhabitants and prevents, by its moral consequences, the social revolution that threatens our great capitals.”\(^\text{114}\) This, then, is Foucher’s avowed project: pacification of the working class. Though a democrat and a republican, his disagreement with the aims and means of the Exhibition, it would seem, is only partial. He rejects as utopian the Exhibition’s vision of a harmonious society and argues

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for a social-scientific consideration of “man as he is.” But he does not in any way reject the underlying principle of the power of images. Nor does he reject the politics of hierarchy and control. For the organisers of the Exhibition of 1867, representations could be used to create a social utopia; for Foucher de Careil, illusions could be used for ameliorative social management. With the example of these two projects, notable as much for their similarities as for their differences, we can see the startling ease with which the discourse of utopianism fed into the discourse of social-scientific control. That Foucher de Careil, who identified with the moderate left and was harshly critical of the Exhibition’s capitalist utopianism, nevertheless accepted so much of the Exhibition’s underlying ideology reveals the extent to which that ideology had come to permeate French thought across the political spectrum.

The Exhibition of 1867 had presented a vision of society in which harmony prevailed among the classes, and art and industry worked in concert to bring about the betterment of humanity. For Michel Chevalier and Frédéric Le Play this was a vision that was dependent on religious sentiment. Among the contributors to the *Etudes sur l’Exposition de 1867*, this religious utopianism was either a non-issue or a cause of outrage. Nevertheless, in a number of their essays we can see the central preoccupations of the Exhibition’s organisers reflected, albeit in a distorting mirror. The unity of art and industry was as important to the authors of the *Etudes* as it was to the organisers of the Exhibition, as was the concern with the lot of the working classes; the power of image and display to effect social change was assumed by both the Exhibition organisers and the critics in the *Etudes*. But these ideas were given new meaning in the pages of the *Etudes*. The unity of art and industry became less about the betterment of humanity and more about the legitimacy of engineering; social harmony became social control; transformative representation gave way to manipulative illusion. The
technocratic agenda advanced in the *Etudes sur l'Exposition de 1867* would come to have important effects on the history of modern France and of the modern world more generally. Given that this agenda was, at least in part, the product of a discursive battle whose terms had been set by religious utopians, it represents a clear if somewhat unusual example of the real of utopia.
Conclusion

On 18 November 1867, two weeks after the closing of the Universal Exhibition, Napoleon III addressed the legislature on the subject of the Exhibition. “It has disappeared,” he said, “but its imprint will deeply mark our age.”\textsuperscript{115} The Exhibition had represented modern industrial society in a way that David Baguley has aptly described as “spectacularly utopian.”\textsuperscript{116} This utopia never became a reality in the way its authors intended, but it did leave an imprint on its own and subsequent ages, and it thus has much to reveal to historians.

In particular, it should lead us to an appreciation of the historical importance of utopias, of both the “real of utopia” and the “utopian dimension of reality,” to quote Michèle Riot-Sarcey and Antoine Picon. The utopia that was exhibited in 1867 was very much the product of a particular time and place. The rapid progress of modern industry in the nineteenth century led many contemporaries to dream of a new social order of universal peace and prosperity. In the first half of the century, this dream typically manifested itself in movements that are usually described, with varying degrees of accuracy, as utopian socialism. Generally speaking, these movements came to an abrupt end after the failure of the revolutions of 1848. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, “utopian” increasingly became a term of abuse, and the political left began to embrace the “scientific” socialism of Karl Marx.\textsuperscript{117} Some veterans of utopian socialism, however, retained their utopianism but

\textsuperscript{116} Baguley, \textit{Napoleon III and His Regime}, 194.
\textsuperscript{117} For the classic Marxian attack on “utopian socialism,” see the section entitled “Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism” in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in \textit{The Marx-Engels Reader}, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 359-61, and Friedrich Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,” in \textit{The Marx-Engels Reader}, 605-39. Edward Berenson argues that Marxism remained relatively insignificant in French politics until the founding of the French Communist Party after the First World War, and that there is a high degree of continuity between the French socialism of the early nineteenth century and that of the late nineteenth century. This is true insofar as avowed Marxists were rare in
switched political teams, embracing what can only be called utopian capitalism. Michel Chevalier, who retained the same preoccupations from his Saint-Simonian youth through to his free-market old age, is the paradigmatic example of this political evolution. The economic expansion and modernisation of the Second Empire confirmed for him that industrial capitalism was the best possible fulfilment of his utopian aspirations. As we have seen, the capitalist utopianism of the Second Empire shared many fundamental assumptions with the earlier socialist utopianisms, especially with regard to attitudes toward labour and industry. The mutation of this utopian tradition from left to right is a phenomenon that deserves more attention from historians of the nineteenth century, as it can lead us to a fuller understanding of the extent to which the culture of capitalism was built on utopian foundations.

One of the most conspicuous features of the utopianism of the Universal Exhibition of 1867 was its affinity for technocracy and a politics of control, which was made especially clear in the reception and negotiation of this utopianism in the *Etudes sur l'Exposition*. The role of Saint-Simonianism in the emergence of technocracy is a commonplace in the literature on the subject,118 but it needs to be stressed that the link with technocracy is not merely a facet of Saint-Simonianism, but of utopianism more generally. In an essay entitled “Society as Utopia,” the sociologist Alain Touraine has argued that utopianism is inextricably bound up with a peculiarly modern conception of the social:

Utopia gives form to the idea that the human being is entirely social, that a person has neither supernatural nor individual reality, even if the social order is often conceived of as part of a wider natural order. Utopia is a plea for a

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118 On this, see Carlisle, “Birth of Technocracy,” 445-64.
society that creates itself, imposing freedom or servitude on its members, pushing away any nonsocial principle of the legitimacy of the social order.\textsuperscript{119}

In other words, the quest for a perfect social order necessarily subordinates everything to the social and thus paves the way for the politics of technocratic domination and control. The trajectory of the utopianism of 1867, from Chevalier and Le Play through the Exhibition to the \textit{Annales du Génie civil}, speaks volumes about the role of utopianism in the formation of technocracy.

Another conspicuous feature of the utopianism of the Exhibition was its religiosity. For Chevalier and Le Play, the perfectibility of society was grounded in religious and spiritual assumptions about social harmony, labour, and industry. To some extent, it was these religious assumptions that gave their utopian project cultural currency, as Le Play and Chevalier shared these assumptions with other currents of political thought, notably much of the nineteenth-century socialist movement. The presence of this religious element has serious implications for our understanding of utopia and modernity. As part of its role in the formation of the social, Touraine argues that utopianism is also inextricably bound up with the formation of the secular. "Utopia was really born only when the political order separated from the cosmological or religious order," according to Touraine; thus, "utopia is one of the products of secularization."\textsuperscript{120} At first glance, the persistent religiosity of Le Play and Chevalier would seem to contradict this hypothesis. But a closer examination of their religiosity in fact confirms it. There is no denying that that religiosity of Chevalier and, to a lesser but still significant extent, Le Play was a very worldly kind of religiosity. In their


\textsuperscript{120} Touraine, "Society as Utopia," 18, 29.
thought, religion is most often valued primarily for its positive social effects. This does not mean that their religious beliefs were insincere or merely tactical, but it does highlight that for Le Play and Chevalier the religious was largely subordinated to the social. In a world in which the human order was still inseparable from the religious or cosmological order, the arguments of Chevalier and Le Play would have been unnecessary and meaningless. Thus, their utopianism was, in fact, a product of secularization inasmuch as it accepted the autonomy and even the primacy of the social. For religion to become part of the modern utopian project, it had to accept its subordination to the social.

But even in this subordinated state, there is no denying that religion was absolutely crucial for both Chevalier and Le Play. It inspired and bolstered their support for modern industry and capitalism, and it led them to embrace a political programme of social hierarchy and technocratic control. As such, the prominent place of religion in their thought is a powerful refutation of the assumptions that are still often made about the incompatibility of religion and modernity; for Chevalier and Le Play there was no contradiction in being both religious and modern. Just as Edward Berenson has shown that nineteenth-century French socialism was derived from and sustained by religiosity, it seems something similar must be said about nineteenth-century capitalism.

Finally, it is not incidental that the ultimate expression of the utopianism of Le Play and Chevalier can be found in the Universal Exhibition. As Antoine Picon has argued, utopian movements played a central role in the emergence of “the new regime of relations between representations and practices” that is at the core of modern mass culture. As mass cultural spectacles par excellence, designed to be both entertaining and didactic, and to use

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121 See Berenson, Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics.
122 Picon, Les saint-simoniens, 28.
representations in the service of social transformation, universal exhibitions naturally attracted those of a utopian frame of mind. Later exhibitions, especially those of the twentieth century, became less high-minded and more dedicated to amazement and diversion than instruction. But, as has often been remarked, the early universal exhibitions were of unrivalled importance in shaping the forms of mass culture that are still with us; in the words of Robert Brain, the “fundamental values and modalities [of universal exhibitions] have been preserved, transmuted and dispersed in cinema, television, department stores, spectacular politics—all of the myriad mechanisms of mass culture.”¹²³ That those values and modalities were shot through with religious utopianism is therefore an issue of pressing contemporary relevance.

As a site for an archaeology of modernity, the Universal Exhibition of 1867 is extraordinarily rich. Taking place at an important historical juncture, it allows us to see the formation of some of the key elements of modernity: technocracy, mass culture, and the culture of industry and capitalism. In looking at the Exhibition and the discourses surrounding it, we can see clearly that these elements, and the relations between them, were shaped by powerful currents of religious utopianism peculiar to the nineteenth century. The Exhibition, then, is a powerful example of the historical importance of utopias; and, to borrow a phrase from Antoine Picon, it is a stark reminder of “all that modernity owes to the quest for transcendence.”¹²⁴

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