

I add, nonetheless, that I will retain, with the common folk, these three words: *religion, government, property*, for reasons of which I am not the master, which partake of the general theory of Progress, and for that reason seem to me decisive: first, it is not my place to create new words for new things and I am forced to speak the common language; second, there is no progress without tradition, and the new order having for its immediate antecedents religion, government and property, it is convenient, in order to guarantee that very evolution, to preserve for the new institutions their patronymic names, in the phases of civilization, because there are never well-defined lines, and to attempt to accomplish the revolution at a leap would be beyond our means.

I believe it useless, with a judge as well-informed as you, sir, to prolong this exposition. I affirm Progress, and, as the incarnation of Progress, the reality of the Collective Man, and, finally, as a consequence of that reality, an economic science: that is my socialism. Nothing more, and nothing less.

VIII.

Allow me, sir, before passing on, to summarize the different meanings of that generic term *Progress*. In logic, it is translated by *series*, the general form of reasoning, which is nothing other, it seems to me, than the art of classifying ideas and beings.—If the series is reduced to two terms in essential opposition, in necessary and reciprocal contradiction, as takes place, for example, in the formation of concepts, it indicates an analysis and takes the name of antinomy. The antinomic dualism, reduced by the equation or fusion of the two terms into one, produces the synthetic and true idea, the *synthesis*, celebrated among the mystics under the name of *trinity* or *triad*.

The Philosophy of Progress

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

1853

to desert the civil tribunal for the tribunal of commerce, etc., etc.

There is not a critique on my part, not an affirmation or a negation which, in that order of ideas as in all the others, is not explained, justified or excused, however you want to put it, by the same law. All that I have said of centralization, of the police, of justice, of association, of worship, etc., follows from that.

I have done more: after dispelling any pretext of irritation and hatred, I have taken care to distinguish, in Progress, *acceleration* from *movement*. I have repeated *ad nauseam* that the question of speed could be left to the consideration of the majorities, and that I did not regard as adversaries, or as enemies of Progress, those who, accepting with me the idea of movement and the sense of its general direction, differed perhaps on the details and the time involved. Must we race or crawl? This is a practical affair, not for the consideration of the philosopher, but of the statesman. What I maintain is that we cannot preserve the *status quo*.

Many times it has been said to me: Tell it like it is. You are a man of order: do you, or do you not want government? You seek justice and liberty, and you reject the communitarian theories: are you for or against property? You have defended, in every circumstance, morals and the family: do you have no religion?

Well, I uphold completely all my negations of religion, government and property; I say that not only are these negations in themselves irrefutable, but that already the facts justify them; what we have seen burgeon and develop, for several years, under the ancient name of religion, is no longer the same thing that we have been accustomed to understand under that name; that which agitates in the form of empire or *cæsarism*, will sooner or later no longer be empire nor *cæsarism*, nor government; and finally, that which modifies and reorganizes itself under the rubric of property, is the opposite of property.

the highest expression of the absolute, the most complete negation of the ideas of equality, order and progress.

If anything has surprised me, in the course of this socialist polemic, it is much less the irritation produced by my ideas than the contradictions that have been raised against them. I could understand selfishness; I do not understand disagreement in the presence of truth and the facts. In order to pull society from the vicious circle where it has suffered death and passion for so many centuries, it is necessary, I insist, to enter resolutely on the path of progression and association; to pursue the reduction of rent and interest to zero; to reform credit, by raising it from the entirely individualist notion of *loan* to the thoroughly social one of reciprocity or *exchange*; to liquidate, according to that principle, all public and private debts; to purge all mortgages, to unify taxation, to abolish *octrois* and duties, to create the patrimony of the people, to insure inexpensive products and rents, to determine the rights of the laborer, to remake corporate and communal administration, to reduce and simplify the allocations of the State. Then, economic phenomena would occur in an opposite mode; while today the market lacks production, it will be production which will lack for a market; while wealth grows in arithmetic fashion and the population geometrically, we will see that relation inverted, and production become more rapid than population, because it is a law of our moral and aesthetic nature that the more intensity acquired by labor and the more perfection acquired by men, the less fecundity is possessed by the genetic faculty, etc.

I have remarked, since first addressing these issues, that society is already engaged, at all points, with the concept of industrial progress; that accordingly the definition of property, following the constitution of 1848, is in complete contradiction with the Code, and at base justifies my own definition; that under the influence of the same causes all jurisprudence tends to approach more and more the idea of commutative justice and

Contents

FOREWORD	5
THE PHILOSOPHY OF PROGRESS	14
FIRST LETTER: OF THE IDEA OF PROGRESS	16
I.	17
II.	25
III.	29
IV.	31
V.	35
VI.	38
VII.	43
VIII.	48
IX.	51
X.	57
XI.	66
SECOND LETTER: ON CERTAINTY AND ITS CRITERION	74
I.	75
II.	78
III.	89

presents a parallel and systematic development in misery and crime.

Thus I have shown, or I believe I have shown, that the Malthusian theory of the productivity of capital, justifiable as a means of mercantile order, and to a certain degree favorable to economic movement, becomes, if one applies it on a grand scale, if one claims to generalize it and make of it a law of society, incompatible with exchange, with circulation, and consequently with social life itself; that in order to end that incompatibility, it is necessary to reconstruct the integral idea, to make it so that each borrower is a lender, each lender a borrower, and so that all accounts, to the debit and to the credit, balance; that if the circulation is not today regular, if the return of values by sale is not made by each producer with the same ease as their outflow by purchase; if the stagnations, crises and unemployments, are for the bankrupt a permanent means of equilibrium, it is first because the *valorization* of products ceases with gold and silver, because all merchandise is not, like gold or silver, taken for currency, which constitutes within the general wealth a destructive inequality;—in the second place, because of the capitalist prelibation,¹⁰ a consequence of money's prerogatives;—thirdly, because of land rent, which is the keystone, sanction and glorification of the whole system.

I have said that the right of the capitalist, proprietor or master,—who halts the economic movement and hinders the circulation of products, who makes competition a civil war, the machine an instrument of death, the division of labor a system of exhaustion for the worker, taxation a means of popular extenuation and possession of the soil a ferocious and unsociable domain,—was nothing other than the right of force, royal or divine right, as the barbarians conceived and as it results from the definitions of politics and of the casuists,

¹⁰ *Prelibation*: offering of the first fruits.—Editor.

the notion of authority is only, like the notion of an absolute being, an analytic idea, powerless, from whatever direction one might come at authority, and in whatever manner it is exercised, to give a social constitution. For authority, for politics, I then substituted economy, a synthetic and positive idea, alone capable, in my opinion, of leading to a rational and practical conception of the social order. However, I did nothing in this but to repeat the thesis of Saint-Simon, so strangely disfigured by his disciples, and combated today, for tactical reasons that I cannot work out, by M. Enfantin. It consists in saying, based on history and the incompatibility of the ideas of authority and progress, that society is on the way to completing the governmental cycle for the last time; that public reason has gained certainty of the powerlessness of politics, with regard to the improvement of the condition of the masses; that the predominance of the ideas of power and authority has begun to be succeeded, in opinion as in history, by that of the ideas of labor and exchange; that the consequence of that substitution is to replace the mechanism of the political powers by the organization of economic forces, etc., etc.

I trust you, sir, to tell me if I have been logical in my deductions, if, as I think, the idea of progress, the synonym of which is liberty, truly leads there.

It is with regard to economic questions that I have pushed the development and application of my principle the farthest. I have demonstrated, and with some success, it seems to me, that most of the notions on which industrial practice rests at this moment, and thus all the economies of modern societies, are still, like the notions of power, authority, God, devil, etc., analytic conceptions, parts mutually deduced from one another by means of opposition, from the societary group, from its idea, from its law, and each developed separately without restraint and without limits. As a result, society, instead of resting on harmony, is seated on a throne of contradictions, and instead of progressing towards wealth and virtue, as is its destiny, it

FOREWORD

France has exhausted the principles that once sustained it. Its conscience is empty, just like its reason. All the famous writers that it has produced in the last half-century,—the de Maistres, the Chateaubriands, the Lamennais, the de Bonalds, the Cousins, the Guizots, the Lamartines, the Saint-Simons, the Michelets, Catholics, eclectics, economists, socialists, and members of parliament,—have not ceased to predict that moral collapse which, thanks to God's mercy, man's foolishness, and the necessity of things, has finally arrived. The philosophers of Germany have echoed the prophets of France, so that finally the destiny of our homeland has become common to all the old world; for it is written that as French society is, so shall the human race become.

Our Church, which we once boasted was the firstborn, is no longer anything but an institution of convenience for us, protected more by the police than by sympathy. Take away the secular arm and the State subsidy, and what would become of that Gallic Church, the glory of which made Bossuet tremble, the last fortress of Christendom, now fallen to the ultramontanes?...

A man, after having read the profession of faith of the vicar of Savoy, the sermons of Robespierre, the Catechism of the freemasons, the *Paroles d'un Croyant*, the *Lettres sur la Religion* of M. Enfantin, the *Histoire de la Révolution* of M. Bûchez, and the preamble of the Constitution of 1848, might say to himself: This country has a need for church-wardenships which will be satisfied at any price. Bring back the Jesuits!—That is why we are still, after February, of the religion of our fathers...

That makes you murmur: it is repugnant to you that the religion of thirty millions of souls, a thing so holy, remains at the discretion of a head of State, himself perfectly disinterested in the question. What could you have done better? I'll give you a hundred guesses.

The ancient monarchy could compare itself to a marriage contracted under the regime of joint property, which, because of disagreement between the couple, has been converted into paraphernal marriage. It was thought that if the husband was made the simple administrator of the wife's goods, the harmony would be perfect and imperturbable between them. Every year, with great pomp, the king came to present his accounts to the nation, which, for its part, through its representatives, gave quittance to the king. From that ceremonious and solemn meeting was born, in the natural way, the Law, the third person of the constitutional trinity. But, whatever precautions were taken, the dialogue constantly ended in dispute.—That's not it, the man doggedly insists. Peace can only exist in the household if the wife obeys without speaking, and the husband speaks by signs. And beside, today it is really just a matter of negotiation!... Now we are married, as they say in the suburbs, *in the thirteenth*, morganatically.¹

Democracy, as it was formulated by the acts of 1793 and of 1848, has succumbed to the logic of its application. Who would dare to affirm today, in the sense of the *Réforme*, popular sovereignty, universal and direct suffrage? Seven times in eight years the people have been called upon to manifest their will, to act as sovereign; seven times they have responded, like Thiers: *The people reign and do not govern!*

The Bourgeoisie! What did they demand in 89? Sieyès has said it: *Everything!* They didn't try to hide it. Once the aris-

¹ *In the thirteenth*: i.e., "in the thirteenth arrondissement of Paris," which, before 1860, had only 12 arrondissements – i.e., not really married, or "living in sin."

infinite in its attributes, perfect, immutable and absolute, and Humanity, on the contrary, being perfectible, progressive, mobile and changing, the second term could never be understood as adequate to the first; there remains then an antithesis, one term always being the reversed expression of the other, and the consequence of that antithesis or *antitheism*, as I have called it, is to abolish all religion or adoration, idolatry, pneumatolatry, christolatry or anthropolatry, since on one side the idea of God, opposed to that of movement, group, series or progress, does not represent any possible reality, and on the other Humanity, essentially perfectible, but never perfect, remains constantly below its own proper ideal, and consequently always beneath worship. This I summarize in a formula at once positive and negative, and perfectly clear in our language: *Replacement of the cult of the alleged Supreme Being by the culture of Humanity.*⁹

VII.

Is it worthwhile now, sir, for me to recall those of my propositions, which, in politics, political economy, morals, etc., have made the most noise, and caused the most scandal? Must I show how they all resulted from the notion of Progress, which is identical in my mind to that of *order*?

I wrote in 1840 that profession of political faith, as remarkable for its brevity as its energy: *I am an anarchist*. I posited with that word the negation, or rather the insufficiency of the principle of authority... By that I meant, as I later showed, that

⁹ Every social theory necessarily begins with a theory of reason and a solution of the cosmo-theological problem. No philosophy has lacked that requirement. This is what explains why the partisans of political and social hierarchy all begin from a theosophic idea, while the democrats generally incline towards an absolute emancipation of reason and conscience. *In order to democratize the human race*, insists Charles Lemaire, *it is necessary to demonomarchize the Universe.*

evolutions, to anthropomorphize or rather to socialize the ineffable being; that everywhere and always, in popular consciousness, the problem of religion has resolved itself in the identity of social nature and divine nature; that if, on the one hand, the people have loaned to God the faculties, passions, virtues and miseries of humanity,—since it is necessary for him to be born, to speak, act, suffer and die like a man,—on the other, it has conferred of him the attributes of society, rulership, legislation and justice; it has proclaimed him holy like society, and free from death like society, which is immortal.

Thus, what we affirm, seek and worship as God, is nothing but the pure essence of Humanity, social nature and individual nature indivisibly united, but distinct, like the two natures in Jesus Christ. This is what is attested to by popular consciousness and the series of religions, in accord with a rectified and complete metaphysics.

That is not all: while that movement of the humanization of the divine being was pursued by the masses, another movement worked, always unbeknownst to the theologians and the philosophers, in the intellectual discipline: it was the progressive renunciation of the ontological mysticisms, the relinquishment of the categories, recognized as useless for the explication of nature and society as revelations and miracles. In one sense, the human race, by its anthropomorphic tendencies, came into contact and identified itself with Divinity; in another sense, by its growing positivism, it moved away from God, and, so to speak, made God retreat. Thus, where Newton, halted by a difficulty that seemed impossible to him, made Divinity intervene for the equilibrium of the world, Laplace, with a higher science, rendered that intervention useless, and dismissed the god and his machine to the attic.

Let me summarize all these facts and concepts, relating to the religious question: What Humanity seeks in religion, under the name of God, is its own constitution. It seeks itself. Nonetheless, God being, according to the theological dogma,

ocracy was dispossessed, and the national property put up for sale, the bourgeoisie cried that the revolution was accomplished, that there was only anarchy beyond. They have favored every traitorous government, betraying order the very act of preserving and establishing it... What has it demanded since 1830? Grants, awards, positions, monopolies, privileges, *actions de jouissance*, concessions, canals, mines and railroads, which is to say, still and always: Everything. Whatever government is given to it, monarchy, republic or empire, it takes with both hands. Without it, the people would not have the *Right to work*, invoked for the first time by Malouet, a bourgeois of 89. To better take hold of everything, the bourgeoisie takes credit for a socialist idea, forms in companies, places itself under the patronage of the State, which it makes its organizer, contractor and provider. As for producing itself, by labor and genius, agricultural, mercantile or industrial conquest, it no longer remembers how. To that degenerate bourgeoisie, the least enterprise seems a revolution. To flatten a molehill, it would borrow the hoe from the State. Only the size of the annuities does not frighten it. Annuities! That is its *Positivism*: it invented it before M. Comte.

The Bourgeoisie is sick with *gras-fondu*: as an institution, it has ceased to exist in the political and social orders. That word, which no one hears anymore, has been replaced by *capital*, a term of avarice, and in opposition to capital, we have a term of envy, the *salariat*. The *salariat* is the revolutionary level, invented by *capital*. These two watch-words have entered into the language of the people. That is why nothing is accomplished! Capital, like wages, is from now on at the discretion of the prince; and now that the prince borrows all stability from the people, there is nothing stable, neither religion, nor government, nor labor, nor property, nor confidence.

Thanks to the modern eclectics, we have no philosophy. Thanks to the novelists and the romantics, we are at the end of literature. The dancers have put us off statuary, and

the milliners off painting. Nowadays, in the homeland of taste, we make books, paintings, marble statues, the way we make brass decorations or armchairs: articles from Paris, for trans-Atlantic export.

While stockjobbing, organized with privilege, justifies the theory of MM. Malthus and Dupin, and makes us doubt more and more the reality of an economic science, the central prerogative, always invasive, crushes the institutions, undermines, modifies and repeals unceasingly a system of laws that have lasted hardly fifty years! Justice, blind by trade, knows nothing of what happens at the Bourse, and, if it knew, could do nothing. While wild boars and bears devastate the fields of the nation, it chases toads and lizards. Property, more inept still, applauds despotism, and, saved from insults from below, believes that no decree from on high can await it. Ha, ha! You have crushed anarchy; you will have the State in all its glory.

Struck to the heart, the old dynastic parties have lost, along with an understanding of facts, an awareness of their position: so annoyed by the coup of December 2 that they regret not having made it themselves. The same frenzy of absolutism possesses them: do they believe, by this trade-jealousy, to inspire in the people an envy of the “haves”?

What! Bourbon, eldest son of France, you still harbor a grudge against the Revolution! You have not been able to reconcile yourself with 89! The brave bourgeoisie makes you afraid: Mounier seems to you a red, Mirabeau a terrorist, Chateaubriand an atheist! As hostile to the charter as your grandfather, it is still in the *lit de justice* of 23 June 1789 that makes you hope for a third restoration! You know, however, that your sire, Henri IV, became king of France for a sally: *Paris is well worth a mass*, he said. He thought that much of the preaching. Do you not believe that Paris is also well worth liberty?...

And you, gentlemen of Orleans, who should have been for France, according to the phrase of Lafayette, *the best of*

physicians, is reintegrated in its right, the God that we seek can no longer be such as the old theology taught; it must be entirely different than the theologians have made it. In fact, if we apply to the Supreme Being the condition of movement, of progress, and we cannot *not* apply it, since without that attribute it would not be supreme, it will come to pass that that being will no longer be, as before, simple, absolute, immutable, eternal, infinite, in every sense and every faculty, but organized, progressive, evolving, consequently perfectible, susceptible to learning in science, virtue, etc., to infinity. The infinity or absolute of that being is no longer in the actual, it is in the potential... The god of Kant, of Aristotle, of Moses and of Jesus, is thus not true, at least according to the documents produced, since it excludes the most essential condition of existence in nature and humanity, and that exclusion implies a contradiction with the life that one nevertheless accords to it. *I swear by the living God*, says the Church in its exorcisms. God, in a word, *is not*, and cannot *be* in the sense that the metaphysicians give to that word, since the deprivation of all conditionality, or simplicity, far from indicating the highest power of being, marks, on the contrary, the lowest degree; God can only *become*, and it is on this condition alone that it *is*.⁸

What if now, after having dispelled the clever chimeras of theology, I should consult the spontaneous testimonies of the human races on the essence and function of the divine being? I find first that the idea of Progress, inadvertently left off the list of school categories, has not been forgotten by the masses; that by virtue of that idea, the people, reasoning in the freedom of their instincts, speaking in their own name, without the medium of the Academy, the Portico, or the Church, have constantly taken God for a being that is active, mobile, progressive, and sensible; that, to the degree that their intelligence has developed, could think to give to it, has been to make it a man. I see that at all times Humanity has tended, across its religious

and of progress, so long kept in the shadows by the meta-

⁸ “Is God, the substance-cause, simple or multiple? If he is simple as Spinoza thought, by what means, by what action, by what law, can he pass from his mode of metaphysical action to the mode of finite existence, and manifest himself physically by form, variety and succession, in space and time, without dividing himself? There is the crux of the difficulty. Spinoza did not, and could not, resolve it. “With the simple and individual constitution given to the substance-cause, God, endowed moreover with all the other theological attributes, is, in Spinozism, nothing other than a solitary atom of which the extent is infinite. That atom, infinitely extended, occupies by itself all space, or rather there is no space, and the indivisible expanse of God, in its infinity, is nothing other than what we mean by space. “Now, in that simple and indivisible being, in that God-atom, infinite in extension, the property of extent being indivisible, since the subject which possesses it is simple, it is not possible, number not existing in it, to find the reason nor the means of any action whatsoever by which God produces the multitude of extended and finished beings which constitute the phenomena of the universe: his constitution is opposed to it. As he is infinite in his simple and indivisible extent, and there is nothing outside of him, he cannot have in himself anything but himself, that is to say a simple atom, infinite in extent.” (Ch. Lemaire, *Initiation à la philosophie de la Liberté*, t. II.) M. de Lamennais, in his *Esquisse d'une philosophie*, has sensed the difficulty, and he has attempted to resolve it, after the example of the gnostics and kabbalists, by making use of divine hypostases, Love, Will, Intelligence, in order to make them produce in God, according to their categories, all beings. M. Ch. Lemaire refutes that system in this way: “With the constitutional simplicity of God, the condition which necessarily dominates that one of his attributes that we call the understanding, whatever, moreover, the number and variety of other attributes that we have given to God in order to make it come out from its inaction and its powerless to form from its own substance united beings, all these attributes, such as Power, Science, Love even, can only serve to form mythological or abstract personifications; but they are without efficacy to generate the smallest finished being, the smallest form, the smallest distinct personality in God or apart from God, and they logically fail before the simplicity and indivisibility of that God, being infinite and incommensurable with respect to extent. “With regard to effects, God, simple and indivisible substance, cannot then be the cause of finished beings. If one supposes, in order to get out of that difficulty, that the other attributes of God, such as power and science, could change his original constitution, and divide that which is declared to be simple and indivisible, one falls into contradiction, and says that the God which one has declared to be simple would himself destroy the condition of his own existence.”

republics; you, that alone the bourgeois will not restore, have you not a single word for the poor laborer? Socialism was born under your father: the old king would have been only too happy, if he had thrown to the devil the 150 millions for his fortresses! Is your title also at odds with our aspirations? Listen to the popular bid: *Twenty-five millions!* Are you not humbled at all by this?

Let us not speak of the republicans. We know, alas!, that adversity has not discouraged their respect for law, and that will never have been anything among them but lost children who take for rallying cry *dictatorship*, with Pompey, instead of Caesar, for dictator.

France believes only in force, obeys only instincts. It has no more indignation; it seems to find it good not to think. Such a people, such a government! The government, which no inspiration from the country illuminates, does not reflect any idea back to the country. It advances as the spiritualists' tables turn, without visible impulsion: one can define it as a spontaneity. Thus it is seen that after the great crises, the horror of discussions and systems becomes such that governed and governing, vanquished parties and vanquishing, everyone, again and again, close their eyes, and covers their ears, at the mere appearance of an idea. Superstition and suicide: these two words summarize the moral and intellectual state of the masses. The direction of business is in the hand of the practitioners and to the *men of action*; hold back once more the ideologues! One speaks of the isolation of present power in the midst of silent populations: the fact is that the populations have nothing to say to power. They return to it its place in the heavens; they believe in its vocation, in its predestination, just as they believe in themselves. Let it speak and its word will be taken for law. *Ita jus esto!* said the Latin plebs. The revolution protects its beloved: that is the truth about the communications between the country and the government. Will the dawn come soon? We know nothing of it, but we do not doubt it.

Foreign policy is like domestic opinion. It seeks itself, awaiting the stroke of destiny, writing notes that would be called lacking in good faith, if they were not totally without sense. The signatory powers of the treaty of Westphalia and of the Holy Alliance no longer believe in European equilibrium. Against the west in revolution, they invoke oriental barbarism, the war of the races, the absorption of nationalities. No more Poland! No more Italy! No more Hungary! Soon, no more Turkey! Haven't they said in a whisper: No more France! Oh, tocsin of 92!... Diplomacy goes like speculation and the season. Encouraged by the rain, the czar makes a gesture at the emperor, who refuses it: fire mounts to the face of the soldier. But he, eye fixed on the hand of the Bourse, perhaps he waits for the hour to sound on the chauvinism of the bourgeois.

The papacy, however, believes itself returned to its good old days,—not to the days of Leo X, but to those of Innocent III. It dreams of inquisition and crusade. The expedition of Rome against the democrats is not enough for it, it requires an expedition to Jerusalem against the Muslims and the Greeks. It is for this reason that it fans, like a flame, the question of the holy sites: *Forward, Gaulois and Francs!* We would not be surprised if this race of fighters began to shout, as in the past: *God wills it!* Distribute to them, Holy Father, your scapulars and your rosaries: they will not bring back relics to you. There reigns over all of Europe a solemn shadow, like the darkness with which the oracles were surrounded, in the depths of their oak woods and in their caves. Watch out, Napoleon! Prepare yourselves, Guillaume, Ferdinand, Nicolas, and the whole company of the crowned! And you, popes and pontiffs, prepare your *Kyrie eleison* and your *Requiem*. For the spirit of the nations no longer inhabits the rostrums; it has left the mouth of the orator and the pen of the writer. It marches with the soldier, carried like a glint at the point of his bayonet.

of its greatest writers, that even in the circle of its absolutist categories, the mind is always in movement.

Having established beyond doubt the circular course of the mind on the two questions which interest society to the highest degree, religion and government, I ask myself if this does not come from some metaphysical illusion, and in that case, what correction is it necessary to make?

Now, in looking more closely, I find that all that has been written about the *Supreme Being*, from Orpheus through to Dr. Clarke, is only a labor of the imagination on the categories, that is to say on the analytic (simplistic and negative) conceptions, that the understanding is able to draw from the primordial (synthetic and positive) idea of movement; a work which consists, as I observed earlier, in giving a reality to algebraic signs, in affirming as a living being,—active, intelligent and free,—that which is nonetheless neither man, nor animal, nor plant, nor star, nor anything known or sensible, defined or definable, let alone anything grouped or seriated. This being would be pure substance, pure cause, pure will, pure mind, the pure essence, in short, of the entire series of abstractions which are deduced from face A of the idea of movement, by the exclusion of face B. And all that, according to the learned, would become being, conceived in a superior degree, an infinite power, an eternal duration, in the absolute of absolutes.

I reject that line of deduction, first as marred by ignorance, since God, the being of beings, *ens realissimum*, according to the idea that we have made of it, must embrace all the attributes, all the conditions of existence, and since he lacks Progress, the most essential element of the definition. Then I deny that same deduction as destructive of the being that its object is to prove, and consequently as contradictory, precisely because it rests on a series of analyses which, prolonged as long as you like, can only lead to a split, to a negation of that being. And I conclude in my turn, by taking the affirmative, *assumens parabolam*, as Job said, that if the idea of movement

issues that have already been brought forth, concerning the questions, insoluble in the previous state of philosophy, which agitate at this moment the consciousness of the peoples.

Let us speak then of religion, of that respectable faith, towards which the unbelieving still know only how to express contempt, and the believers to form wishes, and in order to summarize in a word all that matter, tackle the problem of *Divinity*. Here again I find myself placed on new terrain, where the idea of Progress comes to reform all that which has been written and taught by the learned, in the name of the Absolute.

VI.

I observe first, something which everyone knows today, that is it with the theological question as with the question of politics; that it is essentially mobile and oscillating by nature, sometimes larger, sometimes smaller in its variations, without, in any of its positions, ever being able to settle or satisfy the mind. The philosopher launched in the pursuit of the divine being is continually led from one hypothesis to another, from fetishism to polytheism, from that to monotheism, from monotheism to deism, then to pantheism, then to idealism, to nihilism, in order to begin again with materialism, fetishism, etc. It is thus that for the man who seeks social order by way of authority, reason is drawn invincibly from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, from that to an oligarchic or qualified republic, from oligarchy to democracy, from democracy to anarchy, from anarchy to dictatorship, to begin again with absolute monarchy, and thus in succession, perpetually. That necessity of transitions without end, which had been so clearly perceived, with regard to the political question, by Aristotle, and which has been established in our own day, with regard to the religious question, by the German philosophy, is perhaps the only positive conquest of philosophy, forced to recognize, by the testimony

However, it is certain that the French speech, ushered in by the old monarchy, cannot perish, any more than the nation can subsist without unity and without right.

It is certain that the democracy, which is nothing else, after all, than the party of movement and liberty, cannot be erased from history for the aberrations and naivety of 1848.

It is certain that the bourgeoisie have a political and social mission to fulfill toward the proletariat. Would you like it better, leaving to Caesar the task of nourishing the electors of Caesar, to eternalize by his egoism the power of a retrograde multitude, and destitute the countries of their liberties?

It is certain, finally, that Europe is a federation of states rendered solidary by their interests, and that in that federation, inevitably brought about by the development of commerce and industry, the priority and predominance of initiative belongs to the west. That predominance,—obtained by Louis XIV and Napoleon, as long as they acted, the first in the name of the principle of nationalities posited by Henri IV and Richelieu, the second in the name of the French Revolution, in the interest of our preservation, much more than that of our glory,—commands us to seize it once again. Should we, to this end, proceed by the road of conquest or that of influence? Should the head of the French state be the president of the European republic, or do you prefer to allow him to pursue the chance to be its monarch, at the risk of a third invasion and the rending of the homeland?...

What am I saying? If there is one thing obvious to every observer, it is that France profits at this moment only by the very ideas that it has proscribed; it is that modern civilization, boiling with traditions and examples, is irrevocably committed to the path of revolution, where neither the historical precedents, nor the written law, nor the established faith can guide it any longer.

Thus it is necessary that royalists and democrats, bourgeois and proletarians, French, Germans and Slavs, set themselves

to seek the unknown principles which govern them. It is necessary to substitute for the empirical formulas of 1648, 1789, 1814 and 1848, an idea, *prior and superior*, which would have nothing to fear from diplomatic and parliamentary sophisms, bourgeois failures and plebian hallucinations. It is necessary, humanity aspiring to know and not being able to believe, to determine its route *a priori*, to write history before the facts are accomplished! Do we want to be governed by science, or abandoned to fate?

Every era is ruled by an idea, which is expressed in a literature, developed in a philosophy, and embodied, if need be, in a government. There was, in the secret thought of 1848, as in that of 1793, 1814 and 1830, the stuff of a democracy, of a dynasty perhaps: that thought has been spurned... like an angular stone cut by bad masons. We will not cease to reproduce it, and whatever will be the standard-bearer of French destinies, prince or tribune, we proclaim it, with a growing faith and energy: *It is by this sign that you will overcome!*

I am asked: What do you publish about the present situation?

Here is the situation: our task is to face up, by reflection, to the necessity of things; it is to begin again our social and intellectual education; and as a party founded on the very nature of the human mind cannot perish, it is to give to democracy the idea and the flag that it lacks.

Up to the present, democracy has followed the forms of monarchic government, monarchic politics, and monarchic economics. This is why democracy has always been only a fiction, incapable of constituting itself. It is time that it learns to think for itself; that it posits the principle which is proper to it, and by affirming itself in a positive manner, carries to completion the system of social ideas.

The two letters that you are going to read were written at the end of 1851. They should have appeared in *La Presse*, in response to the questions of a learned critic, M. Romain-Cornut,

ideas which it communicates to us, its judgments which do not at all resemble ours, its will in diametrical opposition with our instincts, its life, which is not that of the animal or the plant, although it finds analogies there;—a being, finally, who, coming from nature, seems the God of nature, the powers and laws of which it expresses to a superior (supernatural) degree.⁷

Similar doctrines, I know, when they do not claim a revelation from on high, can establish themselves on the facts alone. Also, it is with the aid of the facts, nothing but the facts, not arguments, that I think I can demonstrate the superior existence, the true incarnation of the universal soul... But, while waiting for the facts to be produced, it may be useful to recall certain

⁷ “Man is only a fragment of being; the true being is the collective being, Humanity, which does not die, which, in its unity, develops unceasingly, receiving from each of its members the product of its own activity, and communicating to it, according to the measure in which it can participate, the product of the activity of all: a body of which the growth has no assignable end, which, following the immutable laws of its conservation and evolution, distributes life to the various organs which perpetually renew it, by perpetually renewing themselves.” (*De la Société première et de ses lois*, by Lamennais, 1848.) Who would not believe, after having read this passage where the objective, organic, personal reality of the collective being is affirmed with all the energy and propriety of expression of which the language is capable, that the author was going to give the anatomy, physiology, psychology, etc., of society? But Lamennais is a great poet and not much of a naturalist. The metaphor returns to the divine; and while he believes he only makes an allegory, he posits, unknowingly, a real being of which he is unaware. After having spoken as a humanitarian philosopher of the collective being, M. de Lamennais returns to seeking the laws of society in theology; he analyzes the dogmas of the Trinity and of Grace, and falls again into the intellectual void, proper to the mystics and the phraseologists. I could cite still other writers who, like Lamennais, seem to have touched the reality of the social being, and speak in the finest terms of its *soul*, of its *genius*, of its *passions*, of its *ideas*, of its *acts*, etc. But one quickly perceives that all of that is only figure and verbiage on their part; there is not a fact, not an observation, which testifies that they have understood their own words. It is like the style of those economists, whom one would judge, to read them, disciples of Babœuf or of Cabet, but that one soon recognizes, by their anti-socialist protestations, for the most hypocritical and most insipid of chatterboxes.

side by side in peace. Such is the theory of Rousseau: it is the system of governmental arbitrariness, not, it is true, as if that arbitrariness is the deed of a prince or tyrant, but, what is much more serious, in that it is the deed of the multitude, the product of universal suffrage. Depending on whether it suits the multitude, or those who prompt it, to tighten the social ties more or less, to give more or less development to local and individual liberties, the alleged *Social Contract* can go from the direct and fragmented government of the people all the way to caesarism, from relations of simple proximity to the community of goods and gains, women and children. Everything that history and the imagination can suggest in the way of extreme license and extreme servitude can be deduced with equal ease and logical rigor from the social theory of Rousseau.

According to others, and these despite their scientific appearance seem to me hardly more advanced, society, the moral person, reasoning being, pure fiction, is only the development among the masses of the phenomena of individual organization, so that knowledge of the individual immediately gives knowledge of society, and politics resolves itself into physiology and hygiene. But what is social hygiene? It is apparently a liberal education, a varied instruction, a lucrative function, a moderate labor, and a comfortable regime for each member of society: now, the question is precisely how to procure all of that for ourselves!

For me, following the notions of movement, progress, series and group, of which ontology is, from now on, compelled to take account, and the various findings that economics and history furnish on the question, I regard society, the human group, as a being *sui generis*, constituted by the fluid relations and economic solidarity of all the individuals, of the nation, of the locality or corporation, or of the entire species; which individuals circulate freely among one another, approaching one another, joining together, dispersing in turn in all directions;—a being which has its own functions, alien to our individuality, its own

but the coup of December 2 occurred.—They can be regarded as the author's philosophical and social profession of faith.

Nothing persists, said the ancient sages: *everything changes, everything flows, everything becomes*; consequently, everything remains and everything is connected; by further consequence the entire universe is opposition, balance, equilibrium. There is nothing, neither outside nor inside, apart from that eternal dance; and the rhythm that commands it, pure form of existences, the supreme idea to which any reality can respond, is the highest conception that reason can attain.

How then are things connected and engendered? How are beings produced and how do they disappear? How is society and nature transformed? This is the sole object of science.

The notion of Progress, carried into all spheres of consciousness and understanding, becoming the basis of practical and speculative reason, must renew the entire system of human knowledge, purge the mind of its last prejudices, replace the constitutions and catechisms in social relations, teach to man all that he can legitimately know, do, hope and fear: the value of his ideas, the definition of his rights, the rule of his actions, the purpose of his existence...

The theory of Progress is the railway of liberty.

Before publishing, with the procession of proofs that it requires, the ensemble of our views on these high questions, we have thought it necessary to consult the public and our friends on the sequence to give to our researches. We dare to hope that criticism will not be lacking for this first sample: we will be happy if, informed by salutary advice, we are able to lift a corner of the veil that steals the light from us!...

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PROGRESS

called *spiritual* nature, other monads, injuriously considered *material*: these school distinctions seem senseless to me. I do not occupy myself with that *caput mortuum* of beings, solid, liquid, gas or fluid, that the doctors pompously call substance; I do not even know, as much as I am inclined to suppose it, if there is some thing which responds to the word *substance*. Pure substance, reduced to its simplest expression, absolutely amorphous, which we could quite happily call the *pantogene*, since all things come from it:—if I cannot exactly say that it is *nothing*, appears to my reason as if it *was not*; it is equal to nothing. It is the mathematical point, which has no length, no breadth, no depth, and which nonetheless gives birth to all geometric figures. I consider in each being only its composition, its unity, its properties, its faculties, so that I restore all to a single reason,—variable, susceptible to infinite elevation,—the group.⁶

V.

It is following that conception of *being* in general, and in particular of the human self, that I believe it possible to prove the positive reality, and up to a certain point to demonstrate the ideas (the laws) of the social self or humanitarian group, and to ascertain and show, above and beyond our individual existence, the existence of a superior individuality of the collective man, an existence that philosophy could not even suspect before, because, following its ontological concepts, it was absolutely incapable of conceiving it.

According to some, society is the juxtaposition of similar individuals, each sacrificing a part of their liberty, so as to be able, without harming one another, to remain juxtaposed, and live

⁶ Modern science confirms that definition of being. The more that physics and chemistry advance, the more they *dematerialize*, and tend to constitute themselves on purely mathematical notions.

sequently, it *is*. The more numerous and varied the elements and relations which combine in the formation of the group, the more centralizing power will be found there, and the more reality the being will obtain. Apart from the group there are only abstractions and phantoms. The living man is a group, like the plant or the crystal, but of a higher degree than those others; he is more living, more feeling, and more thinking to the degree that his organs, secondary groups, are in a more perfect agreement with one another, and form a more extensive combination. I no longer consider that *self*, what I call my *soul*,⁵ as a monad, governing, from the sublimity of its so-

⁵ We know that the original meaning of the words *soul* and *spirit* is breath, respiration. It is according to this material image that the ancients conceived their pneumatology, which placed the soul in the lungs, and quite logically denied it to stones and plants, since they could not be seen to breathe. Later, in its turn, flame became the term of comparison, and the soul was lodged in the blood. *The blood of an animal is its soul*, says the Bible. Descartes put it in the pineal gland. It is astonishing that the discoveries of modern physics have not led to a more radical revolution in pneumatology. All bodies radiating caloric, light and electricity, all are in a state of perpetual absorption and exudation, all are penetrated and enveloped by a fluid which is normally invisible, but which sometimes becomes apparent, as in combustion, electrical discharge, the aurora borealis, etc. It is by this fluid, which we like to consider the soul of the world, that bodies act on one another, attract, repulse and combine with one another, pass into the solid, liquid or gaseous state. What prevents us from saying that the human soul is also a fluid, formed from the combination of several others, as the flesh and bone are composed of various elements, which envelops and penetrates the body, courses through the nerves, makes the blood circulate, which puts us, at a distance, in more or less intimate relations with our fellows, and by that communication creates superior groups, or new natures?... If we push that study as far as we would like, we will never see, ourselves, in all these *fluid manifestations*,—even supposing them as free of error, of charlatanism and of superstition as the most rigorous science can demand,—anything but analytic or symmetric speculations on being, its attributes and its faculties. The transcendent existence, to our eyes, is not that of supposed *spirits* or *aromas* which, separated from their *bodies*, are as chimerical as time or space would be, separated from the idea of movement; it is the sensible, intelligent and moral man; it is above all the human group, Society.

Usus et impigra simul riperimentia mentit
Paulatim docuit pedelentim progredientes.
— Lucretius, *De naturâ rerum*.

FIRST LETTER: OF THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

Sainte-Pélagie, November 26, 1851.

Sir,

Before reporting to the public on my various publications, you wish, for greater exactness, to ask me how I envision the whole, how I understand the unity and the connections.

This desire on your part, sir, could not be more legitimate, and the question is as just as it is fair. There is no doctrine where there is no unity, and I would not merit an hour of investigation, as a thinker or as a revolutionary, if there was not something in the multitude of propositions, which are sometimes very disparate, which I have by turns sustained and denied, something which connects them and forms from them a body of doctrine. In times past, one asked a man, wandering far from his home: What is your God? What is your religion?... It is the least that one could demand of a newcomer, to know what, in the last instance, is his principle.

I do not know how to thank you enough, sir, for that high impartiality, for that good faith in critique, which makes you seek before everything else, not the weakness of the writer,—it is only too apparent,—but his true thought, the exact value of his assertions. In all judicial operations it is necessary, before pronouncing the sentence, to listen to the defendant: the most just judgment is that which results from the testimony and confessions of the accused.

I am going, sir, to try to satisfy your demand, or, rather, I am going to give myself up, bound hands and feet, to your justice,

of movement, are pure conceptions of the understanding; neither bodies nor souls exist, neither creator nor created, and the universe is a chimera. If the author of the monadology had been in good faith, he would have concluded thus, with Pyrrho, Barclay, Hume and the others.

Thus the system of the monads, despite all the genius of its author, has remained without partisans: it was too clear. Witness the poverty, or cowardice, of human reason! We have preserved, as articles of faith, the simplicity of cause, the simplicity of the self, the simplicity of mind, but we have affirmed the composition of creatures and the divisibility of matter: on this strange compromise rests the ontology of the moderns, their psychology, and their theodicy!...

With the idea of movement or progress, all these systems, founded on the categories of substance, causality, subject, object, spirit, matter, etc., fall, or rather explain themselves away, never to reappear again. The notion of being can no longer be sought in an invisible something, whether spirit, body, atom, monad, or what-have-you. It ceases to be simplistic and become synthetic: it is no longer the conception, the fiction of an indivisible, unmodifiable, intransmutable (etc.) *je ne sais quoi*: intelligence, which first posits a synthesis, before attacking it by analysis, admits nothing of that sort *a priori*. It knows what substance and force are, in themselves; it does not take its elements for realities, since, by the law of the constitution of the mind, the reality disappears, while it seeks to resolve it into its elements. All that reason knows and affirms is that the *being*, as well as the idea, is a group.

Just as in logic the idea of movement or progress translates into that other, the *series*, so, in ontology, it has as a synonym the *group*. Everything that exists is *grouped*; everything that forms a group is *one*. Consequently, it is perceptible, and, con-

The *one* is thus only a hypothesis; the *self* is not a being: it is a fact, a phenomenon, and that is all.

I cannot prevent myself from noting in passing the illusion that, for so many centuries, has made the philosophers reel off so many ontological absurdities.

The condition of all existence, after movement, is unquestionably *unity*; but what is the nature of that unity? If we should consult the theory of Progress, it responds that the unity of all being is essentially *synthetic*, that it is a unity of composition.⁴ Thus the idea of movement, primordial idea of all intelligence, is synthetic, since, as we have just seen, it resolves itself analytically into two terms, which we have represented by this figure, A @ B. Similarly, and for greater reason, all the ideas, intuitions or images that we receive from objects are synthetic in their unity: they are combinations of movements, varied and complicated to infinity, but convergent and single in their collectivity.

That notion of the one, at once empirical and intellectual, condition of all reality and existence, has been confused with that of the *simple*, which results from the series or algebraic expression of movement, and, like cause and effect, principle and aim, beginning and end, is only a conception of the mind, and represents nothing real and true.

It is from this *simplism* that all of the alleged science of being, ontology, has been deduced.

It has been said that the *cause* is simple;—consequently the *subject* is simple, and *mind*, the highest expression of the cause of the self, is equally simple.

But as Leibniz observed, if the cause is simple, the *product* of that cause must still be simple: this is the *monad*. If the subject is simple, the *object* that it creates to oppose to itself, it cannot not be simple, thus matter is simple as well: this is the *atom*.

Let us draw the consequence: cause and the effect, the *self* and the *non-self*, mind and matter, all these speculative *simplicities* that analysis derives from the single and synthetic notion

⁴ Protagoras says: There is nothing except in relation to something else.

by presenting to you here, not a defense, but a general confession. Take me then, if you can, by my testimony. I will not have the right to appeal your sentence.

I.

That which dominates all my studies, its principle and aim, its summit and base, in a word, its reason; that which gives the

¹ The idea of Progress is not new. It had not escaped the ancients. (See *de l'Idée du Progrès*, by Javery, 1 vol. in-8°, Orléans, 1850.) Plato and the stoics, Aristotle, Cicero and a crowd of others, not counting the poets and mythologists, clearly understood it. Among the moderns, it was expressed by Pascal, and sung, as it were, by Bossuet, in his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, composed in the imitation of Daniel and de Florus. It was reproduced, with new force, by Lessing, served as motto for the sect of the Illuminati of Weisshaupt, and comprised, in the epoch of the French Revolution, the originality of Condorcet. But it is above all in our century that it has been posited with brilliance. All the socialistic schools have invoked it as the principle of their critique, and up to a certain point have made it a part of their systems. We know the historical division of Saint-Simon: *Theocracy, Feudalism* or governmentalism, *Industry*;—that of August Comte: *Religion, Metaphysics* or philosophy, and *Positivism*;—that of Fourier: *Edenism, Savagery, Patriarchy, Barbary, Civilization, Garantieism, Harmony*. Progress has served Pierre Leroux to rejuvenate the dogma of metempsychosis, and, an even stranger thing, Bûchez believes he has found there the last word of Catholicism. It would be useless to enumerate, not just all the writers, but all the theories, all the sects and schools which are prevailed over by the idea of Progress. Democracy in its turn has taken hold of it, without suspecting that such an acquisition was as incompatible with its official doctrines as with theology itself. We have not forgotten the *Revue du Progrès*, composed by Louis Blanc until around 1840. Very recently, another democratic writer, Eugène Pelletan, has taken it for the subject of a publication that lacks, it is said, neither philosophy nor interest. Under the name of *Liberté absolue*, it is still Progress that is affirmed by the editor in chief of *la Presse*, M. de Girardin. Finally, there are none even among our most bitter conservatives who do not claim Progress: though in their language, Progress, opposed to the Revolution, indicates a movement so slow that it is the equivalent of stasis. Despite all these studies, it can be said that within philosophy Progress remains in the state of a simple phenomenon: as a principle, it has not entered into the speculation. It is still neither a truth nor a mere error. As long as it had been conceived

key to all my controversies, all my disquisitions, all my lapses; that which constitutes, finally, my originality as a thinker, if I may claim such, is that I affirm, resolutely and irrevocably, in all and everywhere, *Progress*, and that I deny, no less resolutely, the *Absolute*.

All that I have ever written, all that I have denied, affirmed, attacked, and combated, I have written, I have denied or affirmed in the name of one single idea: Progress. My adversaries, on the contrary—and you will soon see if they are numerous—are all partisans of the absolute, in *omni génère, casu et numero*, as Sganarelle said.

What then is Progress?—For nearly a century everyone has talked about it, without Progress, as a doctrine, having advanced a step. The word is mouthed: the theory is still at the point where Lessing left it.¹

What is the Absolute, or, to better designate it, *Absolutism*?—Everyone repudiates it, nobody wants it anymore; and yet everyone is Christian, protestant, Jew or atheist, monarchist or democrat, communist or Malthusian: everyone, blaspheming against Progress, is allied to the Absolute.

If, then, I could once put my finger on the opposition that I make between these two ideas, and explain what I mean by Progress and what I consider Absolute, I would have given you the principle, secret and key to all my polemics. You would possess the logical link between all of my ideas, and you could, with that notion alone, serving for you as an infallible criterion with regard to me, not only estimate the ensemble of my publications, but forecast and signal in advance the propositions that sooner or later I must affirm or deny, the doctrines of which I will have to make myself the defender or adversary. You would be able, I say, to evaluate and judge all my theses by

as the very being of beings, we had hardly seen there anything but an accident of creation, or a march of society towards a culminating and definitive state, which each had tried to predict or describe, according to his individual aspirations, in the fashion of the legislators and utopists in all eras.

and divide: by a strange caprice, they only battle and dispute the best demonstrated solutions...

In short, and to conclude this section, I affirm that the ancient method of ratiocination on which philosophy has subsisted up to the present, and in which our generation has been raised, is from now on proven false, that it is all the more false and pernicious as it admits today, into its old arsenal, a new instrument of war, Progress: from which I conclude that our logic must as soon as possible be reformed by the construction of that new idea, under penalty of infamy and suicide.

IV.

If from logic and the dialectic we pass to ontology, we meet, after the introduction of the idea of Progress, impossibilities no less numerous and no less grave, which arise from analogous observations, and call for the same reform.

All that our treatises of physics, chemistry, and natural history contain of general ideas about the body, and about the intelligence, is pulled from the speculations of Aristotle, Abelard, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, etc., what one called in the Middle Ages, universals and categories: *Substance, cause, mind, matter, body, soul*, etc. One single notion, the most important, has not furnished its contingent, *Progress*.

Doubtless, one no longer speaks to us of occult qualities, of entities, quiddities, of the horror of the void, etc. All of that has disappeared from ontology, but are we more advanced? Is it not true that all our scientists, without exception, like our psychologists, are still, willy-nilly, dualists, pantheists, atomists, vitalists, materialists, mystics even, partisans finally of all the systems, of all the dreams to which the old ontology gave birth?...

verse, but as the complete description of a movement of the mind, inverse to that indicated by the syllogism, and traced, just as in the syllogism, by a small number of marks.

The dilemma, considered the strongest of arguments, would no longer be considered anything but a weapon of bad faith, the dagger of the brigand who attacks you in the shadows, from the back and from the front, to the extent that it has not been rectified by the theory of the antinomy, the most elementary form and simplest composition of movement.

But that is not all that reform of the dialectical instruments bears upon. It is still necessary to know, and never to lose from view, that even the most authentic and most certain method of reasoning cannot always, by itself, lead to a complete distinction of truth. It is, I have said elsewhere, in the classification of ideas as it is in those of the animals and the plants, as in the operations of mathematics themselves. In the two kingdoms, animal and vegetable, the genera and species are not everywhere and always susceptible to a precise determination; they are well defined only in the individuals placed at the extremities of the series; the intermediaries, compared to those, are often unclassifiable. The more one prolongs the analysis, the more one sees spring up, from the observation of characteristics, reasons for and against any given classification. It is the same in arithmetic, in those divisions where the dividend, extended to as many decimal places as you like, can never be resolved in an exact quotient. It is thus with ideas, and all those who have scanned the treatises of jurisprudence, who have occupied themselves with trials and with proceedings, have felt it. Ideas, I say, are not always, whatever subtlety of dialectic we employ, completely determinable; there is a mass of cases where the elucidation will always leave something to be desired. And as if all kinds of difficulties come together to torment the dialectician and drive the philosopher to despair, it is never on the doubtful cases that the mass of humans hesitate

what I have said and by what I do not know. You would know me, *intus et in cute*, such as I am, such as I have been all my life, and such as I would find myself in a thousand years, if I could live a thousand years: the man whose thought always advances, whose program will never be finished. And at whatever moment in my career you would come to know me, whatever conclusion you could come to regarding me, you would always have either to absolve me in the name of Progress, or to condemn me in the name of the Absolute.

Progress, in the *purest* sense of the word, which is the least empirical, is the movement of the idea, *processus*; it is innate, spontaneous and essential movement, uncontrollable and indestructible, which is to the mind what gravity is to matter, (and I suppose with the vulgar that mind and matter, leaving aside movement, are something), and which manifests itself principally in the march of societies, in history.

From this it follows that, the essence of mind being movement, truth,—which is to say *reality*, as much in nature as in civilization,—is essentially *historical*, subject to progressions, conversions, evolutions and metamorphoses. There is nothing fixed and eternal but the very laws of movement, the study of which forms the object of logic and mathematics.

The vulgar, by which I mean the majority of the *savants* as well as the ignorant, understand Progress in an entirely utilitarian and material sense. The accumulation of discoveries, multiplication of machines, increase in general well-being, all by the greatest extension of education and improvement of methods; in a word, augmentation of material and moral wealth, the participation of an always greater number of men in the pleasures of fortune and of the mind: such is for them, more or less, Progress. Certainly, Progress is this as well, and the progressive philosophy would be short-sighted and bear little fruit, if in its speculations it began by putting aside the *physical, moral and intellectual improvement of the most numerous and poorest class*, as Saint-Simon's formulas said. But all of that only gives us a re-

stricted expression of Progress, an image, a symbol, (how shall I say it?) a product: philosophically, such a notion of Progress is without value.

Progress, once more, is the affirmation of universal movement, consequently the negation every immutable form and formula, of every doctrine of eternity, permanence, impeccability, etc., applied to any being whatever; it is the negation of every permanent order, even that of the universe, and of every subject or object, empirical or transcendental, which does not change.

The Absolute, or absolutism, is, on the contrary, the affirmation of all that Progress denies, the negation of all that it affirms. It is the study, in nature, society, religion, politics, morals, etc., of the eternal, the immutable, the perfect, the definitive, the unconvertible, the undivided; it is, to use a phrase made famous in our parliamentary debates, in all and everywhere, the *status quo*.²

Descartes, reasoning unconsciously according to the prejudices of the old metaphysics, and seeking an unshakable foundation for philosophy, an *aliquid inconcussum*, as it was said, imagined that he had found it in the self, and posited this principle: *I think, therefore I am; Cogito, ergo sum*. Descartes did not realize that his base, supposedly immobile, was mobility itself.

² Why is despotic government also called *absolute*? It is not only because the prince or despot puts his will above the will of the nation, his good pleasure in the place of the law. Personality and arbitrariness in power are only a consequence of absolutism. Government is called absolute, first because it is in its nature to concentrate, either in a single man, in a committee or an assembly, a multiplicity of attributions, the essence of which is to be separated or seriated, according to a logical *deduction*; in the second place, because once that concentration is carried out, all movement or Progress becomes impossible in the State, and thus in the nation. Are the kings not called the representatives of God?... It is because they affect, like that alleged absolute being, universality, eternity and immutability.—The people, on the contrary, all division and movement, are the incarnation of Progress. This is why democracy is averse to authority: it returns to it only by delegation, a middle term between liberty and absolutism.

of *same* and of *other*, which in turn lead me to those of *subject* and *object*, of *mind* and *matter*, etc., to which I will return soon.

It is thus that with the help of a single notion, of which I admit, furthermore, the impenetrability, because it is existence itself and life, with the notion, I say, of movement and of Progress, I can account for the formation of ideas, and explain all intuitions and conceptions, the former by way of composition, the latter by way of analysis. This is not, I imagine, the route that has been followed up to now by the philosophers who have speculated about movement: but for that, they would have long ago made an application of their method to social practice; a long time ago they would have revolutionized the world. For such is the theory of ideas, and such is the economy of the human race.

III.

The theory of ideas leads me to that of reasoning.

From the moment that I conceive of movement as the essence of nature and of mind, it follows first that reasoning, or the art of classifying ideas, is a certain evolution, a history, or, as I have sometimes called it, a *series*. From this it follows that the syllogism, for example, the king of arguments of the ancient school, has only a hypothetical, conventional and relative value: it is a truncated series, proper only to produce the most innocent babble about the world, by those who do not do not know how to return it to its fullness, by bringing about its full reconstruction.

What I say about the syllogism must be said about the Baconian induction, the dilemma, and all the ancient dialectic.

The induction, remaining sterile in the hands of the philosophers, despite the declaration of Bacon, would return as the instrument of invention and the happiest formula for truth, if it was conceived, no longer as a sort of syllogism taken in re-

ual movement which constitutes the universe. These two ideas, purely speculative on our part, indicate in things nothing more than relations. To accord any reality to these notions is to make for oneself a willful illusion.

From that double concept, of commencement or principle, and of aim or end, all the others are deduced. *Space* and *time* are two ways of conceiving the interval which separates the two terms assumed from movement, point of departure and point of arrival, principle and aim, beginning and end. Considered in themselves, time and space, notions equally objective or subjective, but essentially analytic, are, because of the analysis which gave rise to them, nothing, less than nothing; they have value only according to the sum of movement or of existence that they are supposed to contain, so that, according to the proportion of movement or existence that it contains, a point can be worth an infinity, and an instant eternity. I treat the idea of *cause* in the same way: it is still a product of analysis, which, after having made us suppose in movement a principle and a goal, leads us to conclude by supposing further, by a new illusion of empiricism, that the first is the *generator* of the second, much as in the *father* we see the author or the cause of his *children*. But it is always only a relation illegitimately transformed into reality: there is not, in the universe, a first, second, or last cause; there is only one single current of existences. Movement is: that is all. What we call cause or force is only, like that which we call principle, author or motor, a face of movement, the face A; while the effect, the product, the motive, the aim or the end, is face B. In the ensemble of existences, that distinction has no more place: the sum of causes is identical and adequate to the sum of effects, which is the very negation of both. Movement or, as the theologians say, creation, is the natural state of the universe.

From the idea of movement, I further deduce, and always by the same analytic method, the concepts of *unity*, of *plurality*,

Cogito, I think—these words express movement; and the conclusion, according to the original sense of the verb *to be, sum, ειναι, ου ,ηηη (haïah)*, is still movement. He should have said: *Moveor, ergo fio, I move, therefore I become!*

From that double and contradictory definition of progress and the absolute is first deduced, as a corollary, a proposition quite strange to our minds, which have been shaped for so long by absolutism: it is that the truth in all things, the real, the positive, the practicable, is what changes, or at least is susceptible to progression, conciliation, transformation; while the false, the fictive, the impossible, the abstract, is everything that presents itself as fixed, entire, complete, unalterable, unailing, not susceptible to modification, conversion, augmentation or diminution, resistant as a consequence to all superior combination, to all synthesis.

So the notion of Progress is provided to us immediately and before all experience, not what one calls a criterion, but, as Bossuet says, a favorable prejudice, by means of which it is possible to distinguish, in practice, that which it may be useful to undertake and pursue, from that which may become dangerous and deadly,—an important thing for the government of the State and of commerce.

Indeed, among the many projects of amelioration and reform that are produced daily in society, it is unquestionable that some are found useful and desirable, while others are not. Now, before experience has decided, how can one recognize, *a priori*, the better from the worse, the practical thing from the false speculation? How do you choose, for example, between property and communism, federalism and centralization, direct government by the people and dictatorship, universal suffrage and divine right?... These questions are all the more difficult since there is no lack of examples of legislators and of societies that have taken for a rule one or the other of these principles, and since all the contraries find their justification equally in history.

For me, the response is simple. All ideas are false, that is to say contradictory and irrational, if one takes them in an exclusive and absolute sense, or if one allows oneself to be carried away by that sense; all are true, susceptible to realization and use, if one takes them together with others, or in evolution.

Thus, whether you take for the dominant law of the Republic, either property, like the Romans, or communism, like Lycurgus, or centralization, like Richelieu, or universal suffrage, like Rousseau,—whatever principle you choose, since in your thought it takes precedence over all the others,—your system is erroneous. There is a fatal tendency to absorption, to purification, exclusion, stasis, leading to ruin. There is not a revolution in human history that could not be easily explained by this.

On the contrary, if you admit in principle that every realization, in society and in nature, results from the combination of opposed elements and their movement, your course is plotted: every proposition which aims, either to advance an overdue idea, or to procure a more intimate combination, a superior agreement, is advantageous for you, and is true. It is in progress.

For example, moral philosophy and the experience of societies have not pronounced in a definitive manner on the question of whether or not, in a perfected legislation, divorce is allowed. One never fails to cite in this connection the examples of the Romans, the Greeks, and the Orientals, the sentiments of the Greek Church and the Reformed Church, the authority of Moses and of Jesus Christ himself. Before that mass of testimonies, one asks what the opinion of France, and of other countries ruled by catholic discipline, matters.—I admit, for myself, that I am not much moved by that argumentation, which it would be as easy to make serve in the defense of polygamy, indeed even of promiscuity. The ancient socialists, like several among the moderns, did not abstain from this. I do not ask myself what has been in past centuries, and what is still in most nations, the state of woman, in order to deduce by comparison

two faculties are only one; the inside and the outside are two faces of a single activity; it is impossible for me to go further.

The idea of movement once arrived at, all the others are deduced from it, intuitions as well as conceptions. It is a wrong, in my opinion, that among the philosophers, some, such as Locke and Condillac, have claimed to account for all ideas with the aid of the senses; others, such as Plato and Descartes, deny the intervention of the senses, and explain everything by innateness; the most reasonable finally, with Kant at their head, make a distinction between ideas, and explain some by the relation of the senses, and the others by the activity of the understanding. For me, all our ideas, whether intuitions or conceptions, come from the same source, the simultaneous, conjoint, adequate, and at base identical action of the senses and the understanding.

Thus, every intuition or sensible idea is the apperception of a composition, and is itself a composition: now, every composition, whether it exists in nature or it results from an operation of the mind, is the product of a movement. If we were not ourselves a motive power and, at the same time, a receptivity, we would not see objects, because we would be incapable of *examining* them, of *restoring* diversity to their unity, as Kant said.

Every conception, on the contrary, indicates an analysis of movement, which is itself still a movement, which I demonstrate in the following manner:

Every movement supposes a direction, A @ B. That proposition is furnished, *a priori*, by the very notion of movement. The idea of direction, inherent in the idea of movement, being acquired, the imagination takes hold of it and divides it into two terms: A, the side from which movement *comes*, and B, the side where it *goes*. These two terms given, the imagination summarizes them in these two others, *point of departure* and *point of arrival*, otherwise, *principle* and *aim*. Now, the idea of a principle or aim is only a fiction or conception of the imagination, an illusion of the senses. A thorough study shows that there is not, nor could there be, a principle or aim, nor beginning or end, to the perpet-

from the point of view of ideas, and setting aside the question of form, is, in my judgment, only an immense waste. No one understands his neighbor or himself any more, and if sometimes, in party affairs particularly, some seem to enter into agreement, it is because some residue of prejudice makes them repeat the same words and phrases, without attaching the same meaning to them. Since the notion of Progress has entered our minds, the Absolute having preserved most of its positions, chaos is in all heads; and as Progress, to some degree, imposes itself on all with an invincible force, the most insane is still the one who, believing himself rid of it, pretends not to be mad.

I have done what I could, insofar as my strength allowed, no doubt with more goodwill than aptitude, to shed a bit of light on this darkness: it is not up to me to say to what extent I have succeeded, but here is, more or less, how I have proceeded.

Movement exists: this is my fundamental axiom. To say how I acquired the notion of movement would be to say how I think, how I am. It is a question to which I have the right not to respond. Movement is the primitive fact that is revealed at once by experience and reason. I see movement and I sense it; I see it outside of me, and I sense it in me. If I see it outside of me, it is because I sense it in me, and *vice versa*. The idea of movement is thus given at once by the senses and the understanding; by the senses, since in order to have the idea of movement it is necessary to have seen it; by the understanding, since movement itself, though sensible, is nothing real, and since all that the senses reveal in movement is that the same body which just a moment ago was in a certain place is at the next instant in another.

In order that I may have an idea of movement, it is necessary that a special faculty, what I call the *senses*, and another faculty that I call the *understanding*, agree in my consciousness to furnish it to me: this is all that I can say about the mode of that acquisition. In other words, I discover movement outside because I sense it inside; and I sense it because I see it: at base the

what it would be suitable to bring about among us; I seek that which is on its way to becoming. Is the tendency to dissolution or to indissolubility? That is the question for me. Now, it appears obvious to me, independent of considerations of domestic interests, morals, dignity, justice, even happiness, that one can assert here that Latin monogamy, sustained and ennobled by Catholicism, shows a triumphant tendency to indissolubility; it appears to me that the Greek church has remained stationary on this point, that the Protestant church has been retrograde, and that the French code, with its exceptions for nullity, is still the most advanced expression of Progress. Let us add that the question of divorce, resolved in the affirmative, would imply a similar retrogradation of the whole political and social order, since at the end of the question of divorce there is another question of inequality, as one has seen from the Saint-Simonian theory. It is this that I call a *favorable prejudice*; since, for me, to ask if we will introduce divorce into our laws, is to ask implicitly if we will return to feudalism by capitalism, if government will be despotic or liberal, in short, if we will be progressive or reactionary.

Such is then, in my opinion, the rule of our conduct and our judgments: there are degrees to existence, to truth and to the good, and the utmost is nothing other than the march of being, the agreement between the largest number of terms, while pure unity and stasis is equivalent to nothingness; it is that every idea, every doctrine that secretly aspires to prepotency and immutability, which aims to eternalize itself, which flatters itself that it gives the last formula of liberty and reason, which consequently conceals, in the folds of its dialectic, exclusion and intolerance; which claims to be true in itself, unalloyed, absolute, eternal, in the manner of a religion, and without consideration for any other; that idea, which denies the movement of mind and the classification of things, is false and fatal, and more, it is incapable of being constituted in reality. This is why the Christian church, founded on an allegedly divine and im-

mutable order, has never been able to establish itself in the strictness of its principle; why the monarchic charters, always leaving too much latitude to innovation and liberty, are always insufficient; why, on the contrary, the Constitution of 1848, in spite of the drawbacks with which it abounds, is still the best and truest of all the political constitutions. While the others obstinately posit themselves in the Absolute, only the Constitution of 1848 has proclaimed its own revision, its perpetual reformability.³

With this understood, and the notion of Progress or universal movement introduced into the understanding, admitted into the republic of ideas, facing its antagonist the Absolute, everything changes in appearance for the philosopher. The world of mind, like that of nature, seems turned on its head: logic and metaphysics, religion, politics, economics, jurisprudence, morals, and art all appear with a new physiognomy, revolutionized from top to bottom. What the mind had previously believed true becomes false; that which it had rejected as false becomes true. The influence of the new notion making itself felt by all, and more each day, there soon results a confusion that seems inextricable to superficial observers, and like the symptom of a general folly. In the interregnum which separates the new regime of Progress from the old regime of the Absolute, and during the period when intelligences pass from one to the other, consciousness hesitates and stumbles between its traditions and its aspirations; and as few people know how to distinguish the double passion that they obey, to separate what they affirm or deny in accordance with their belief in the Absolute from that which they deny or affirm in accordance with their support for Progress, there results for society, from that effervescence of all the fundamental notions, a pell-mell

³ Absolute government is thus, *a priori*, impossible. Also, the crime of the despots is much less in the perpetration of their idea than in their will to commit it: it is that powerless will which makes the *liberticide*.

of opinions and interest, a battle of parties, where civilization would soon be ruined, if light did not manage to make itself seen in the void.

Such is the situation that France finds itself in, not only since the revolution of February, but since that of 1789, a situation for which I blame, up to a certain point, the philosophers, the publicists, and all those who, having a mission to instruct the people and form opinion, have not seen, or have not wanted to see, that the idea of Progress being from now on universally accepted,—having acquired rights from the bourgeoisie, not only in the schools, but even in the temples,—and raised finally to the category of reason, the old representations of things, natural as well as social, are corrupted, and that it is necessary to construct anew, by means of that new lamp of the understanding, science and the laws.

Dimsit lucem à tenebris! Separation of positive ideas, constructed on the notion of Progress, from the more or less utopian theories that suggest the Absolute: such is, sir, the general thought which guides me. Such is my principle, my idea itself, that which forms the basis and makes the connections in all my judgments. It will be easy for me to show how, in all my controversies, I have thought to obey it: you will say if I have been faithful.

II.

Thus I maintain, and it is one of my most unshakable convictions, that with the notion of Progress all our old Aristotelian logic, all that school dialectic is valueless, and that we must rid ourselves of it swiftly, or else talk nonsense all our lives. What one takes for reasoning today, a melange of absolutist and progressive ideas, is only a fortuitous or arbitrary association of ideas, a glittering rigamarole, a precious or sentimental *phébus*. I will not cite examples to you: our contemporary literature,

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



Pierre-Joseph Proudhon
The Philosophy of Progress
1853

Retrieved on 11 December from
[https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/working-translations/
the-philosophy-of-progress-revised-translation/](https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/working-translations/the-philosophy-of-progress-revised-translation/)
Translation by Shawn P. Wilbur, with assistance from Jesse
Cohn, 2009. Revised by Shawn P. Wilbur, December, 2011.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

In ontology, Progress is *group*, that is *being*, as opposed to all the chimeras, whether substantial, causative, animistic, atomistic, etc.

From the idea of being, conceived as group, I deduce, by one sole and single argument, this double proposition: that the simplistic, immutable, infinite, eternal and absolute god of the metaphysicians, not *becoming*, is not and cannot *be*; while the social being, which is grouped, organized, perfectible, progressive, and which by its essence always becomes, *is*. Comparing then the facts of religious consciousness with those of metaphysics and economics, I arrive at this decisive conclusion, that the idea of God, with regard to its content, is identical and adequate to that of Humanity, while, with regard to its form, it is antagonistic.

In the political order, the synonym of Progress is *liberty*: collective and individual spontaneity, evolving without obstacles, by the gradual participation of citizens in sovereignty and government. But that participation remains forever illusory, and the political movement would realize itself in an invariable cycle of revolutions without end, and of uniform tyrannies, if political reason, recognizing finally that the true object of government is to guarantee the liberty of the producer and trader, by insuring the just distribution of wealth, did not end, after having separated the contents from the political idea, by changing its organization. Authority has then for its organic formula economy, and the correlative of liberty is equality, not a real and immediate equality, as communism intends, nor a personal equality, as the theory of Rousseau supposes, but a commutative and progressive equality, which gives a completely different direction to Justice.

Let us admit, indeed, for a moment, the principle of the *a priori* equality of goods and of persons. What a singular thing! The consequence of that alleged equality would be stasis, the absolute, consequently misery. Society would doubtless continue to stagnate or to agitate; it would no longer progress. The

human species, constituted on an anticipation, taking its end for its means, instead of being itself, would no longer be anything but an analog of certain animals, such as ants, beavers, etc., societies of which have existed since creation, but which do not advance at all. For a society thus made, the principle of order, or, to put it better, of station, would find itself, as in societies founded on inequality or caste, an imperative power, dominating all wills, subordinating all energies, absorbing in its collective virtuality all spontaneous individualities. It is according to this system of absolutism that the first States were organized; it is thus that by yielding always a little under the invisible pressure of liberty, across a thousand contradictions and a thousand inconsequences, they have maintained themselves in the old spirit of their institution.

But let a revolution, like that of 89, suddenly proclaim industrial liberty and with that single word the notion of equality changes: civilization can no longer encounter obstacles in its advance; at the same time the old political form is left inapplicable. With the principle of liberty in work and of equality in exchange, which implies the acceptance of taxation and monitoring, the equilibrium of society can no longer depend, in principle, on sovereign commandment, king or people; it results virtually from the synallagmatic, quotidian determination of the *rights* and the *holdings* of the members. Governmental centralization is thus succeeded by contractual solidarity; the constitution of political powers is replaced by the organization of the economic forces. It is because of this that socialism was right to say, in 1848, that all the declarations of rights and duties, all the charters and all the codes promulgated previously or to be promulgated in the future, reduce themselves to two articles, the *right to work* and the *right to exchange*. Labor and exchange are the alpha and the omega of the revolution.

Thus, on the one hand, the suppression of the political forms is nothing other than the suppression of the hindrances imposed on Progress by political tyranny; on the other, it is the

ticism, from slavery to communism, from the most ferocious superstition to mysticism, the kabala and gnosis. Now nothing remains for us to take. The tradition is exhausted, and we are forced to become original in our turn, and to continue the movement.

But nothing in nature is produced without pain: the last revolution of Humanity did not escape that law. The interests, surprised in their foolishness, are frightened; superstition roars, pedantry bellows, the *status quo* protests. These are triumphant symptoms, which indicate to us that the revolution penetrates, that it acts on and possesses society.

Sleep in peace, reformers: the world has no need of you.

Economic science, although its constitution is not achieved, is already too powerful for it to allow the old prejudices to undertake anything against its decrees, which are the decrees of the revolution itself.

No more barbarians, capable of imposing on civilization the torture of a new feudalism. Were they our masters, the Cossacks would be nothing: they would no sooner set foot on the sacred ground of Progress than they would become its apostles.

No more religious current which could, as in the first century of our era, absorb and recast in a superior cult the multiplicity of Churches; no more Christ or Mohamed, who dares to repeat, after Voltaire:

We need a new cult, we need new chains,

We need a new god for the blind universe!

All that is finished! We will find salvation only in innovation and movement. It is not to you, sir, that one must cry: *Those who have ears, let them hear!* You hear and, better than any other, you know how to express to the public these two very simple propositions:

Affirmation of Progress:

Negation of the Absolute.

I am, etc.

emancipation of the laborer or the exact compensation of products, which is the decisive and solemn act by which Humanity, breaking the chain of privilege, enters into the endless career of Justice.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, said the author of the Gospel, Jesus Christ, following all the ancient sages. A good maxim, but vague, and its uncertain glow has not hindered for thirty centuries the servitude of the human race. For what is it that I should want others to do to me?... As long as a precise answer is not made to that question, justice collapses. Economic science puts an end to that indecision by declaring that for each able-bodied citizen, *the revenue must be equal to the product*. The formula, this time, is categorical and concrete; it aims neither at the sublime nor at the sentimental; it has no more pretension to astonish the learned than to make the frivolous *caillettes* swoon. But find me a formula which is more crushing of pride, more hopeless for bad faith, which better removes the excuses for cowardice and envy, which also insures the rights of all by leaving more liberty to each?

IX.

By giving to Justice a more practical and precise formula, the theory of economic progress has posited the foundation of morals.

Moral science is the ensemble of the precepts that aim for the perseverance of justice. It is, in other words, the system of *justification*, the art of rendering oneself holy and pure by works, which is to say, still and always, Progress. *Happy are the pure of heart*, it was said at the Sermon on the Mount, *because they shall see God!* These words, so much better than the theory of charity, summarize the whole law. They signify that holiness, the apogee of justice, is the very basis of religion, and that the beautiful vision, the sovereign good of the ancient

philosophers,—happiness, as the modern socialists say,—is its fruit. To see God, in the language of the myths, is to have consciousness of one's own virtue; it is to enjoy it and thereby collect the prize. Thus, morals has no sanction but itself: it would infringe on its dignity, it would be immoral, if it drew its cause and its end from some other source. That is why morals has tended at all times to separate itself from theological dogmatism, and the essence of religion has tended to separate itself from the religious envelope, the vain figures of which could only compromise it. In Rome, the formulas of religion were all, like the articles of the Decalogue, juridical formulas. In China and Japan, where all theology had been rejected early, it was precisely the practice of sanctification, or cult of purity, which was preserved. Purity or clarity of reason, purity or innocence of heart, purity or health of the body, purity or justice in action and sincerity in speech, purity even in justice, which is to say, modesty in virtue: these are the morals of Progress, and this is my religion. It supposes a continual effort on itself, and it allows all transitions, it suits all places and times. The moral law—remark it well, sir—is the one thing that I regard as absolute, not with regard to the form of the precept, which is always variable, but with regard to the obligation that it imposes. And yet, that Absolute is still only a transcendent idea, having for aim the ideal perfection of the human being, by fidelity to the law and to progress.

But, you will ask me, who is holy? And if no man can boast of being holy, how, with the theory of Progress, will you resolve the problem of man's destiny? Sin exists, and it is a great question among the wise, to know if it diminishes, or if on the contrary it does not, with civilization itself, extend its empire. All the centuries have resounded with laments of the growing malice of the generations. The orator denounces the decadence of the century to the tribunal: *O tempora, o mores!* he cries. And the poet, in his misanthropy, sings the progress of vice and crime:

dividual analysis, and contradictory among themselves insofar as one considers them in the individual, resolve into synthetic ideas in society, so that each man reasons and acts by virtue of a double self, enjoys a double intelligence, speaks a double language, pursues a double interest; when, I say, one will take into account that organic dualism sensed by all religions, and which composes at once collective existence and individual existences, one will conceive more easily the resolution of the contraries in ontology and metaphysics, and the scandal of the divergence and contradiction of the philosophies will reach its end.

These philosophies will all appear true, as special analytic deductions of the universal theory of movement; but each of them will also appear false, insofar as they aspire to make a schism, and exclude their rivals.³ Thus, the philosophical problem being resolved, it will be true to say that the philosophical movement is accomplished: in the place of systems, starting from an arbitrary conception and leading to a fatal contradiction, we would have progressive science, the ever-greater comprehension of being, of law and of unity.

Thus religious dogmatism would also receive its rational interpretation, and the political order its free constitution: every theosophy dying away in the realm of morals, every cult in education, all government in economics, all authority in contracts.

Thus, finally, we would know why, the economic science having until recently been lacking, general equity must arrive so late; why the humanitarian evolution which ended a first time, for the cults at the fall of polytheism, for politics at the ruin of empire Roman Empire, had to begin again with Christianity, feudalism and modern philosophy; why, in a word, leaving aside the progress of industry and the sciences, civilization has been for fifteen centuries only a repetition.

Since the theory of interests had been neglected, it was necessary for us to copy everything, to repeat everything from the Romans and the Greeks, from the antique tyranny up to eclec-

influence on it; how then the economic relations, products of in-

³ The philosophy of Progress reconciles systems by showing that their apothegms all rest on analytic notions which are only true to the extent that they are coupled to other notions that are equally analytic, but diametrically opposed, in a common synthesis; so that each is true, but on the condition that the contrary is true as well:

Examples:

All ideas come from the senses. Locke.

All ideas are conceived in the understanding. Descartes.

The first proposition is true only if one admits at the same the second, and vice-versa. It is the same for the following:

Bodies do not exist. Berkeley.

Minds do not exist. Hume.

Philosophy is the study of first principles. All the dogmatists.

There are no first principles. The skeptics.

It is necessary to draw up a table of the categories. Aristotle and Kant.

There is no table of the categories. Cousin.

Every philosophy comes from empiricism. The Scottish.

Every philosophy tends to free itself from empiricism. The Germans.

The ideas of cause and substance, going beyond sensation, are chimeras. Hume.

The ideas of cause and substance, going beyond sensation, are necessarily conceived by the mind, and prove it. Kant.

Every positive science defines its object and its method. Jouffroy.

Every positive science tends, by its progress, to overcome its limits. Ch. Renouvier.

Genera and species are things. Realism.

Genera and species are conceptions. Conceptualism.

Genera and species are names. Nominalism.

In that example, the three terms clearly boil down to two, since, in order to create a name, one needs a thing or a conception, that is to say an idea.

There is one God. Monotheism.

There are many gods. Polytheism.

All is God. Pantheism.

There is no God. Atheism.

There are two persons or hypostases in God. Magism.

There are three persons in God. Christianity.

There are four, seven, ten, etc., persons in God. Gnosticism.

There is no company in God. Mohammedanism.

All these formulas, which seem to combat one another, draw in one another and resolve themselves in the idea of the being (group, series, evolution or movement), raised to its highest power and analyzed by these concepts.

Ætas majorum, pejor avis, tulit

Nos nequiores, mox daturos

Progeniem vitiosiore.

If then sanctity exists nowhere on the earth, if sanctification does not succeed among mortals, Progress remains without a conclusion. It is necessary to consider the longer term, and after having freed militant humanity from the Absolute, to make it return there for its coronation. What use, consequently, is the idea of Progress, if Progress, like the fall, calls for a transmundane solution, something like immortality? What can the theory be which, after having posited Progress as the condition *sine qua non* of nature and mind, is forced to admit that it finds for that Progress neither term nor object, and which would contradict itself if it admitted either?...

Here is my response to that objection.

First, in that which no longer concerns the moral law, henceforth unassailable, but human *morality*, I define Progress as a knowledge of good and evil, consequently *an always growing imputability*.¹¹ So that, whatever is in each generation the proportion of offence, the *merit* and *demerit*, subject to a perpetual oscillation, becomes also always greater.

This is demonstrated by history.

It is proven, 1) that the sciences, the arts, commerce, politics, etc., are in continual progress; 2) that by virtue of that progress the juridical relations are multiplied more and more among men. From this double progress, which is accomplished apart from the will, it nonetheless results for the will, on the one hand, that its passional attractions are more and more exalted, and, on the other, that the sentiment of the just is increased in it proportionally. From these two points of view, it is certain

¹¹ It is not knowledge alone that is augmented, any more than morality; the work of the reason reacts on the reason, and is also reason. Our faculties, taken in the average of their ensemble, are no longer of the same degree nor of the same quality as they were among our fathers: there also there is movement.

that an immense difference exists between modern civilization and primitive society: just as among us sensibility, by shedding its brutal forms, has become livelier, so the respect for right has become more profound. Honest people of the nineteenth century are better and more honest than those of the times of Scipio or Pericles; for the same reason, the vicious have become more villainous. The conformity of the will to moral law is thus today more meritorious, and its resistance more criminal. The progress of our morality, I say, consists in this.

To know now if the sum of culpable deeds diminishes, if that of virtuous acts increases, is a question about which we can dispute at leisure, but of which the solution appears to me in fact impossible, and in any case useless. What is true is that there is an off-setting in all eras between good and evil, as between merit and demerit, and that the most favorable condition for society is that in which the movement in justice is accomplished with the least oscillation, in an equilibrium which excludes equally great sacrifices and great crimes. *Et ne nos inducas in tentationem!* Jesus Christ has said: "Do not expose us, oh God, to proofs too difficult!" One could not characterize more sadly human morality and its timid advance.

Let our conscience, more and more enlightened, acquire thus more and more energy: there is our glory, and there also is our condemnation. Let the idea of good be realized in all our actions, if it is possible, and let the idea of evil remain deep in our hearts, like an enchained power: that is all that we can promise ourselves. To pretend that as the works of virtue become each day more abundant, the principle of sin, which is nothing other than the spontaneity of our animal nature, weakens, would be a contradiction.

Virtuous or culpable, man, in short, becomes always more human: that is the law of his genius and of his morals.

But, you insist, and here is the stumbling block of our poor reason, what is the term of that ascension in Justice? "I have run the race", cried the Apostle. "I have reached the end. Where

and the *not-me* fall with that distinction itself.¹ The being, at its highest degree of existence, is at once me and not-me: it can say equally, speaking of itself as of others, *I, you, he, we, you all, they*. What establishes the identity and the adequacy of persons in it, in the singular, the dual and the plural, is precisely their conjugation.

Just as Descartes could not doubt that he thought, and as doubt raised on his thought would be illegitimate, just so and for much stronger reasons, I cannot doubt that I move, since thought is only a form of movement: in this case, as in the former, and much more than in that case, doubt is contradictory and illegitimate.²

Now, whoever says movement says series, diversified unity, or group, consequently *me* and *not-me*, I and thou, us and them, etc., to infinity. The revelation that I have of myself necessarily implies the one that I have of others, and *vice-versa*, or rather these two revelations amount to only one: from which it follows that the laws of that thought are at the same time and necessarily the laws of things. The contrary would be a contradiction.

Besides, that decisive identity of *me* and *not-me*, so difficult to establish in the realm of pure ideas, will be proven directly and empirically by the physiology of the collective man, by the demonstration of his faculties, of his ideas and his operations.

When one has seen how, in the human species, the individual and society, indivisibly united, form two distinct beings, both thinking active and progressive; how the first receives a part of its ideas from the second, and exercises in its turn an

² Zeno of Elea denied movement, and pretended to justify his negation by a mathematical reasoning, based on the principle of the infinite divisibility of space. But it is clear: 1) that the demonstration of Zeno is itself only a movement of his mind, which involves him in a contradiction; 2) that it rests, like the idea of space traveled across, on an analysis of movement, which is another contradiction; 3) that in posing the infinite division, he requires an infinite *retrogradation*, which is a third contradiction.

Malebranche: as I think only by virtue of my faculty to perceive unity, on the one hand I discover unity everywhere, and on the other I see everything in unity.

On the second point,—that is, if the unity or law that my thought discovers, which consequently becomes immediately the law or form of my thought, is a product of my thought, or if it is at the same time the law of things, and if consequently, third point, it implies the existence, external to my thought, of what I call *things*—I respond that this double question is not one for me, and that it can only be addressed to those who, not acknowledging the synthetic idea of movement as the basis of ontology and logic, depart from the distinction of substances, and from the diverse degrees of being make so many different beings.

Indeed, if it is true, as I believe I have proven, that ontological dualism is the result of the analysis of the idea of movement and of the subsequent realization of the concepts given by that analysis, all the objections drawn from the distinction of *me*

¹ If *to think* [*penser*] and *to weigh* [*peser*] are impersonal [*anonymes*], as etymology proves, the gulf that the ancient ontology had dug between mind and matter is filled in; the vibrations of the ether can transmit the impressions of the brain; consciousness is no longer anything but a source of movements, which the crudest of bodies can echo. By the sole fact that I think, I move; by the conception in my brain of the idea of movement, that idea is executed; and the muscles which receive the effect via the nerves, tend to execute it in their turn. They would undoubtedly execute it, if a thought contrary in sense did not suspend their action, and make the first impulse die at the extremity of the nerves. If two, three, or a greater number of thinking subjects put themselves in relation by any conductor, if a word is cast in their midst, it will produce, unbeknownst to them, a general commotion, translatable into ideas, the spontaneity of which would indicate to superstitious persons the presence of a demon familiar or a departed soul. Would a career open up, from that, for the soothsayers and the necromancers? Perish the thought. Nature, by its harmonies, by the constancy of its laws, by the fixity of its types, teaches us enough to scoff at prodigies and monsters; and it is the sign of a great abasement of intelligence, a prelude to great catastrophes, when the people, incapable of scientific toil, abandon reason and nature to chase after evocations and miracles.

is my recompense?” There where religion makes us glimpse immortality, what says Progress?

To this final question, where every thought is troubled, where philosophy is confounded, I am forced to cut short my words, and to leave despite myself some obscurity. The social facts, which must serve the constitution of morals, being still unknown, I cannot argue from these facts as if they were known: I must limit myself to these sententious assertions.

The immortality of the soul is nothing other than the elevation of man by thought to the ideality of his nature, and the possession that he takes of his own divinity.

The radiant face of Moses, the assumption of Elijah, the transfiguration of Christ, and even the apotheosis of the Caesars, are so many myths which once served to express that idealization.

Art and religion aim to make us labor without ceasing, by the excitations that belong to them, toward the apotheosis of our souls.

Thus the theory of Progress does not promise us immortality, like religion; it gives it to us. It makes us enjoy it in this life. It teaches us to conquer it and to know it.

To be immortal is to possess God in oneself, says the prophet Isaiah, and he expressed this in a single word, of which he made a proper name: *Immanuel*. Now, we possess God by justice.

That possession is for all times, for all places, for all conditions: to obtain it, it is enough to know, want and exercise justice.

Justice is thus at the same time beatitude, as the Portico taught it: its presence makes our happiness, its privation our torment. The idea of a subsequent happiness merited by justice is an illusion of our understanding which, instead of making us think of movement as a series, having its reason in itself and its essential object, persists in seeing there a point of *departure* and another of *arrival*, as if justice, and life as well, was for us only a transformation of our being from one state to another.

But that is a palpable error, refuted in advance by the theory of movement and of the formation of concepts, and moreover it constitutes, as we have just proven, an offense to morals: just as movement is the state of matter, justice is the state of humanity.

The possession of justice is thus equivalent to the possession of God, apart from which there is—and it is religion that declares it—no longer anything for man. It remains to know the character of that possession, relative to the conditions of space and time.

Space and time are nothing by themselves: they are valued only for their content. If an existence, of whatever duration, is raised up to the sublime, if, by the conception of its own ideal and the will to express it, it comes so to speak to touch the absolute, then that existence can be called consummated. It falls into infinity: reaching its apogee, it no longer has anything to do among the living. There is nothing for a being apart from its plenitude, which is its glorification, any more than there is a complement to the universe. Just as the insect, at the highest point in its ephemeral life, is worth as much and more than the sun in the splendor of its rays, so for man just an instant of ecstasy is worth an eternity of paradise. An eternity and an instant, it is the same thing, said St. Augustine. Now, eternity does not repeat itself: and when one has seen God once, it is forever. Duration in the absolute is a contradiction.¹²

Thus, the one who has been illuminated by the ideas of the beautiful, the just and the holy; who has admired, who has loved, who, at one moment in his life, concentrating the effort of all his powers, has sensed in it ineffable exaltation: that one is reassured, and immortality will not escape him. He has lived:

¹² *The death of the just*, celebrated in the Scriptures, and the *annihilation in God*, which forms the basis of buddhism, are nothing other than that. The mysticism of Gerson, St. Theresa, Francis de Sales and Fenelon, also leads there. The Church of Rome, in condemning the latter, has blamed the revelation of the secret rather than the corruption of the doctrine.

III.

Following the example of the Greeks, modern philosophy first asks us how we recognize what the understanding calls *law*, but which is inaccessible to the senses;—in the second place, it asks if these alleged laws, which we suppose rule beings, are not simply the effects of our intellectual activity, or, in other words, an involuntary application of the forms of our reason to phenomena;—finally, it asks if we are certain of the reality of objects, and if the opinion that we have of their existence is anything but a subjective faith. That is the transcendent doubt, in proof of which are cited the contradictory propositions of metaphysics, that Jouffroy among others has declared invincible.

My response will be brief, since it is made in advance, and so it will have the hope of being as clear as it is decisive.

On the first point, namely by what sign we recognize the general idea or law, I respond that it is recognized by the *unity of diversity* which constitutes the series, genus, or species, in short, by the group. It is like the knowledge of things themselves, a simple intuition. Will you ask next how the mind perceives unity? That amounts to asking how there is something or someone who sees and who thinks. I will not respond to that question any more than to this other: How does something exist? Thought, the faculty of discovering and expressing that diversified unity, is the original, prior, immediately given, and thus inexplicable fact of science and of the universe. Without the faculty of perceiving unity, there is no more thought, no more consciousness, no more existence, nothing more at all. I am, I think, I possess unity. Or, leaving aside that grammatical *personality*, which is itself only an accident, *something* is, something thinks, something is one: all these propositions are identical for me. They signify that the essential condition of my thought is to see the law, and to see only the law. I do not prove that perception; I affirm it with Descartes, and with

people have tasted the forbidden fruit; it is necessary, for its abolition or condemnation, that it be rectified until to the end. Abandon your systems of electoral voting, each more absurd than the last, and which only give birth to the tyranny of the majority or its abdication. Make universal suffrage in the image of universal consent. Consider that mass that you are going to poll as a representation of all the ages of Humanity. There are day laborers, domestics, wage-earners, the poor and ignorant multitude, called constantly by its poverty to crime, which represent for you the primitive generations; above that multitude, a middle class, composed of laborers, artisans, and merchants, the mores, opinions and fortunes of which express rather well the second degree of civilization; finally, an elite, formed of magistrates, civil servants, professors, writers, and artists, who mark the most advanced degree of the species. Ask of these diverse interests, these semi-barbaric instincts, these stubborn habits, these so-high aspirations, their intimate thought; classify all these wishes according to the natural progression of groups; then you will find in it a coordinated formula which, embracing the contrary terms, expressing the general tendency and expressing the will of no one person, will be the *social contract*, it will be the law. This is how civilization has generally advanced, behind the backs of the legislators and the men of state, under the cover of oppositions, revolutions and wars...

I believe, sir, that I have sufficiently demonstrated that the criterion of certainty is an anti-philosophical idea borrowed from theology, and the assumption of which is destructive of certainty itself. Not only do metaphysics, politics, legislation, economics, history, and all the sciences reject this idea: the very religion which gave birth to it is rendered inexplicable by it. That proposition seems to me novel enough to merit some elaboration: I come now to the heart of the difficulty.

that is more comforting for him than to hear it said that *he will live*.

The one, on the contrary, whose heart is eaten up by vice, rots in ignorance and laziness. He who has made a law for himself from iniquity, who has put his human intelligence in the service of his brute passions: that one has betrayed his destiny. He will come to the end without having understood existence. If he calls the priest on his death bed, he has need of him. The priest, by his allegories, will perhaps succeed in touching that savage soul. At the last moment, he will inspire in him a sublime idea, and it will communicate to him, to his agony, a spark of moral sense. Then alone the sinner will have glimpsed life, and for the little that he had in him of repentance, he will die in peace...¹³

X.

I said before that the object of art, like that of worship, is to elevate us to immortal beatitude by the stimulation of its pleasures. Permit me to enter into that subject with some explanations. It is above all from the point of view of art that socialism is accused of barbarity, and progress of falsity: it is necessary to know to what extent that double reproach is merited.

Someone says to us: What superiority have the moderns achieved over the ancients, in that which concerns works of art? None. From the first leap, human genius, applying itself to the representation of the sublime and the beautiful, was raised to such a height, that it has been impossible to surpass it since. Let us admit that the idea of progress, becoming fundamental to philosophy and the political sciences, regenerates them, but

¹³ The academics, by their lack of frankness, have produced a generation of libertines; the Jesuits, with their bigotry, have created a generation of atheists. While making souls despair during life, they handle gently the benefit of testimonies *in extremis*. Ask, after that, why the people need religion!

what use can it be to painting and statuary? Will it be enough to say to the artists that by virtue of progress they must, like the mathematicians, be always more profound and more skillful, in order for them to indeed become so?... What if the expression, and consequently the conception of the sublime weakened or remained stationary in humanity? Who would dare to say that the idea of the good or the true grew and strengthened? The theory of progress, after having obtained a more or less genuine triumph in the previous questions, runs aground on the last, the most seductive and pitiless: more unfortunate than Ulysses, it is devoured by the Sirens; it can do nothing for Beauty!...

Such is the objection, which differs very little from my own judgment, that art, setting aside the period of apprenticeship, is by nature always equal to itself, on a level inferior to its greatest sublimities. In what then and how does it fit into the theory of progress? How does it serve it? How does it furnish its last proof? I am going to try to explain.

What morals have revealed to consciousness, in the form of precepts, aesthetics aims to show to the senses in the form of images. The lesson expressed by the Logos is imperative in its tenor, and refers to an absolute law; the figure presented to the senses, explicit in its meaning, positive and realistic in its type, refers equally to an absolute. These are two modes of our education, at once sensible and intellectual, which touch in consciousness, differing between them only in the organ or faculty that serves as their vehicle.

To perfect oneself by justice or to make oneself holy, by observing the temporal law, and by developing it in its entire truth. Such is the end indicated to man by morals;—to perfect himself by art, or, if I dare to make use of that familiar expression, to make himself beautiful, by purifying unceasingly, following the example of our soul, the forms which surround us. Such is the object of the aesthetic. One teaches us temperance, courage, modesty, brotherhood, devotion, labor and justice; the

course, and finally in the innumerable offshoots where it little by little lost its character and disappeared.

Religion, like the State, like all human institutions, manifests itself in a series of essentially opposed and contradictory terms: it is for this reason alone that it is intelligible. Its true criterion is its variations. When Bossuet pointed to the instability of the dogma in reformed churches, and demanded of his own a constancy of faith that does not exist, he made, without knowing it, an apology for his adversaries, and pronounced the condemnation of Catholicism.

Religion is like speech. Nothing is more mobile, more varied, more elusive than human language, and yet language is one in its essence, and the laws of language, much more than formulas of the law and the definitions of theology, are the very expression of reason. Here, as everywhere, the absolute is a pure idea, while the accident is reality itself. Do you say that speech is only a vain sound, grammar a folly, poetry a dream, because the universal language is and can only be an abstraction?...

All truth is in history, as all existence is in movement and the series; consequently every formula, philosophical or legislative, has and can have only a transitional value. Neglect of that maxim is the fecund source of all our aberrations and misfortunes.

Cicero regarded *universal consent* as the highest degree of moral certainty, and all our treatises of philosophy still cite it as the most explicit proof of the existence of God. But is it clear, by all that has just been said, that universal consent only has value if one takes it in the succession of its testimonies. Outside of that, it is only contradiction and falsehood. Considered at any one moment of its manifestations, universal consent loses its name; it becomes *universal suffrage*, the fantasy of the moment set up as an absolute.

Do you then want universal suffrage, which forms at this moment the basis of our public rights, to acquire all the authority of which it has need? There is no question of abolishing it: the

been the same for all contemporaries. According to Christ and the apostles, the kingdom of the Gospel is not of this world; according to Hildebrand and the ultramontanes, the pope, elevated above all power, is the master of the world; according to the Greeks and the Anglicans, the natural head of the Church is the head of State. All these oppositions can be equally justified by tradition, by Scripture, and by the general system of religions; and it would not be difficult to show that the difference of opinions on the independence or the subordination of the temporal power leads to a similar case in dogma. Who is one to believe, Christ speaking for himself, or the Church affirming its supremacy? Gallicans who separate the two powers, or Russians and Anglicans who reunite them? All that is equally a part of Christianity, and it is in perfect contradiction. Which becomes the criterion?

The theory of Progress alone can give a reasonable explanation of the variations of the Christian faith, but on the condition that Christianity loses its Absolute character. That theory considers Christianity as a current of opinions, which formed in the time of Alexander all across Greece and the Orient; which grew and became complicated by a multitude of tributaries, from Augustus to Theodosius; which divided next at Photius; which, under the name of Catholicism, seemed to reach its apogee, from Gregoire VII to Boniface VIII; which subdivided again with Luther; which finally, while frightened of its own movement, attempted to fix itself at Trent, and, killed as Catholicism by the negation of its inevitable mobility, went on to be scattered and lost, as Protestantism, in the sands of American democracy.

To know Christianity is not to affirm such and such a system of dogma, more or less harmonically combined and aiming for stasis; it is to have traveled and visited the Christian river, first in its oriental, Jewish, Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Slavic sources, then in its tumultuous and so often divided

other purifies us, protects us, surround us with splendor and elegance: is it not always the same function, proceeding from the same principle, and tending to the same end?—It is to start low, you say, to make art begin in the bath, with the cutting of the nails and hair! There is nothing small and despicable in all that which relates to the improvement of humanity. Didn't morals commence with the defense of human flesh and bestial love?...

It is a question at present of knowing how that theory of art has been understood and practiced, and how it would be suitable for it to be practiced from now on.

In the beginning, man posited his ideal far from himself; he made it concrete, personified it, and called himself the image of a sublime and beautiful being that he named God. At that moment religion, morals, worship, art and the marvelous were all confounded: and we could predict, the gods having been so conceived, what the artists and poets would become. Among the Greeks, the first images carved were those of divine persons; the first poetry sung was inspired by religion. The gods were beautiful, of a finished beauty; their images had to be beautiful, and all the efforts of the sculptors would tend to give them a typical perfection, which, in approaching Divinity, ended by having nothing of man in it. Worship and art identified themselves to the point that for a time statues were only made for the gods; it would have been almost a sacrilege to make ugly mortals partake of the honors reserved for eternal beauties. All the rest was dealt with as a consequence. Poetry was called the language of the gods; until their last days the oracles were rendered in verse: to speak in prose, in a profane language, in the temples, would have been a great impropriety.

Thus the theory of art among the Greeks resulted entirely from religion. It imposed itself on their successors; it has reigned until our day. The artist, according to that religious theory, sought in everything the most beautiful, at the risk of leaving nature and missing reality. Its aim, as Raphael expressed it, was to make things, not such as nature produces,

but as it should produce them, but does not know how and cannot. It was not enough for him to reveal, by his work, the thought of the Absolute, he tended to reproduce it, to realize it. It is thus that, the imagination always tending towards their ideal, the Greeks arrived, in the expression of the beautiful, at a point that has never been equaled, and perhaps will never be equaled. It would be necessary, to equal and surpass the Greeks, that like them we should believe in the gods, that we should believe in them more than the Greeks, and it is that which is impossible.

The people shared the ideas and the sentiment of the artists: this explains how in that profoundly *idolatrous* society, in love with the form on religious principles, everyone was competent in matters of literature and art. Religion imprinted the same direction on minds, and the same physiognomy on characters; the aesthetic sentiment developed in unison, and while among us literature, music, and all the arts are the perpetual objects of contention, among the Greeks it was the things of taste that were the least disputed. Never has democracy shown itself more sovereign, and popular judgment more incorruptible. The Athenians had only to consult the philosophers of the Academy, the *aristarques* of the *feuilleton*, on the beauty of the statues and temples; they knew all about it, so to speak, from birth, as they knew battles and feasts. The masterworks of Phidias, those of Sophocles and Aristophanes were received without commission and without jury, in the full assembly of the people, who having learned to read in Homer, speaking the language better than Euripides, would not have allowed a directorate of fine arts, appointed by Aspasia, to choose for them their goddesses and courtesans.

Does it follow that the Greeks and their imitators had fulfilled the aim of art, to the point that, despairing of equaling them, it remains for us only to copy and translate them, at the risk of a continued and inevitable decadence?

cally all that is true in the existence of the worlds; as for phenomena, they are as irregular as one can imagine. It is a fact, for example, that the sidereal circles are not round, nor are they oval. More than that, their shaky curves do not return on themselves, etc. Where do they tend, finally? No one knows. The celestial army rolls in a space without bounds, without ever presenting twice in a row the same positions. Is it necessary to conclude that geometry and arithmetic, by which we calculate these movements, are false, and the science illustrated by Newton, Laplace, and Herschel, is a chimera? No. All these variations of the eternal mode prove one thing, namely, that certainty is not in the phenomenon, which considered separately is nothing more than an *accident*, but in the series of evolutions, which alone is *law*.

But let us remain with the things of humanity, for it is there above all that the question of certainty takes on its gravity, and interests us.

I have said that the idea of a criterion of certainty was an importation from theology into the philosophical domain; I have proven, with regard to economics and morals, which the supposed criterion was without possible application. More curious still, it is powerless in religion, the very order of ideas that produced it and for which it had been invented. Religion, like justice and economics, is subject to the law of Progress; for that reason, it no longer has a criterion, so that faith, that *reason of things unseen*, resolves itself in mental alienation, or returns to the dialectic.

Did Christianity exist in Jesus? I do not address this question to the Christian, but to the philosopher. Did it exist in St. Paul, in Augustine, in Photios, in Thomas, in Bossuet? Does it exist in Pious IX, in Nicholas or in Victoria?

Christianity would be diminished, if one reduced it to any particular profession of faith. The ancients did not know all that the moderns accept; the moderns, for their part, do not retain all that the ancients accepted. At no time has the form

the most incompetent of humans has the right to be treated as well as the most learned and the most valiant, if only as a compensation for his weakness and his ignorance.

Clearly, this is no criterion for property, neither for its measure, nor its acquisition, nor its transmission, nor its enjoyment. Note also that from that lack of criterion for the just appropriation of goods, the author of the Gospel has concluded, following Lycurgus, Pythagoras, Plato, for communism, all of antiquity for slavery, and Malthusian economics for the *salarial*.

Now what does the new science, the theory of Progress, say about property?

It says that property, like the price of things, is originally the product of a *contract*, that that contract is determined by the necessity of labor, just as the convention which fixes the price of things is determined by the necessity of exchange; but that, just as with time and competition the price of each thing approaches more and more its true value, so with time and credit property tends more and more to approach equality. Only, while the price of merchandise, or the just remuneration of the laborer, generally reaches its normal rate in a rather short period, property only arrives at its equilibrium after a much longer time: somewhat as if one compared the annual movement of the earth to the revolution of the equinoxes.

Once again, there exists here a rule for law-maker, but there is no criterion for the judge. While eternal justice slowly accomplishes its work, jurisprudence is forced to obey custom, to obey the religion of the contract.

The natural sciences offer examples of that distinction between the *law* of things and their *realization*: the first is absolute and unchanging; the second essentially mobile, approximate and untrue. Thus it is a law that the stars weigh on one another in direct relation to their masses and inverse to the square of their distances; that they sweep areas proportional to time, etc. But these laws, which we can grasp only by embracing in thought immense and numerous revolutions, are practi-

I am so far from thinking so, that I accuse precisely the Greeks, in their course of seeking the ideal, of having weakened the use of it and misunderstood its role, and that I trace back to them the cause of that anarchy, that anti-aesthetic which desolates our civilization, superior though it is in so many ways.

Even in the production of the beautiful, the tendency of the Absolute leads to exclusion, uniformity and stasis, and from there to ennui, to disgust, and finally to dissolution. The slope is irresistible.

Once the god and heroes, goddesses and nymphs, the sacred pomp and scenes of battles, had been depicted, rendered with their celestial types and their Homeric physiognomies, everything was finished for the Greek artist: he could only repeat himself. He had idealized in his god the ages, the sexes, all the conditions of humanity: the young man, the virgin, the mother, the priest, the singer, the athlete, the king; everyone had their idol, or as they said in the Middle Ages, his saint. What more could one ask for! There was only one step left to overcome: by a last effort of idealization, the artist would return those divine effigies to a supreme form, a bit like the philosopher accomplished the reduction of the divine attributes, and made of all the immortal personalities an invisible, unfathomable, eternal, infinite and absolute subject. But such a masterwork was quite simply a chimera: it would have been a fall into allegory, into nothingness. An infinite and unique God, the Absolute, in short, is not represented. Nothing that is in the heavens, on the earth, or in the sea knows how to represent it, as the Hebrew Moses said. From the point of view of art, the unity of God is the destruction of the beautiful and the ideal: it is atheism.

Thus, the theory of art, as the Greeks conceived it, led from ideality to ideality, that is from abstraction to abstraction, straight to the absurd: it could avoid it only by inconsequence. How this would have surprised that philosopher of the ideal, Plato, if it had been demonstrated to him, by Socratic reason-

ing, that all of his philosophy rested on one or the other of these two negations, the negation of God or the negation of Beauty!

Divine Plato, these gods that you dreamed do not exist. There is nothing in the world greater and more beautiful than man.

But man, rising from the hands of nature, is miserable and ugly; he can only become sublime and beautiful through *gymnastics, politics, philosophy, music*, and especially, something which you hardly appear to doubt, the *ascetic*.¹⁴

What is the beautiful? You have said it yourself: it is the pure form, the typical idea of the true. The idea, as idea, exists only in the understanding; it is represented or realized with more or less fidelity and perfection by nature and art.

Art is humanity.

Insofar as we live we are artists, and our craft is to raise in our persons, in our bodies and in our souls, a statue to Beauty. Our model is in ourselves; those gods of marble and bronze that the vulgar adore are only some of its yardsticks.

Gymnastics includes dance, fencing, wrestling, running, equitation, and all the exercises of the body. It develops the muscles, increases flexibility, agility and strength, gives grace and prevents excess weight and illness.

Politics embraces civil right, public right and the right of peoples; administration, legislation, diplomacy and war. It is that which, pulling man from barbarity, gives him true liberty courage and dignity.

Philosophy teaches logic, morals and history: it is the path of science, the mirror of virtue, and the antidote of superstition.

Music, or the cult of the muses, has for its object poetry, oratory, song, the playing of instruments, the plastic arts, painting and architecture.

Its end is not, as you suppose, oh wise Plato, to sing hymns to the gods, to raise temples to them, to erect their statues, to

¹⁴ By *ascetic*, it is necessary to understand here industrial exercise, or

I profoundly respect property, as I respect every institution, every religion. But those who accuse socialism of wanting to abolish property, and who have taken such useless care to defend it, would be deeply embarrassed to say how they recognize, with certainty, that such a thing is the property of such a one, and that there is not another right to that thing. What, in a word, is the criterion of property? If some element of revelation must have had to intervene in human judgments, it is definitely in those which concern property. How much land and how much personal property must return to each? It seems to me that at that question the big eyes of our conservatives are troubled, and that their selfish side is disconcerted.

Is it conquest, first occupation, which creates property?—I observe that force does not make law, and that at the first occasion I would know, without further ado, to take my revenge.

Is it the institution of the State?—I respond that what the state has made, the State can unmake; and as I have the greatest interest in the thing, I am going to try to make myself master of the State.

Is it labor?—I ask: what should the wages of labor be? If each has labored? If those who have labored have received what is due to them, *cuique suum*, neither more nor less?...

Some philosophers who think themselves profound, and who are only impertinent, imagine that they have found a flat refusal of the principle of equality, which forms the basis of the anti-proprietary critique. They say that there are not two equal things in the whole universe.—Very well. Let us admit that there have not been two equal things in the world: at least one will not deny that all have been in equilibrium, since, without equilibrium, as without movement, there is no existence. What then is the equilibrium of fortunes? What are its *minima* and its *maxima*? What is the relation between the *minima* and *maxima* of fortunes, and the *minima* and *maxima* of capacities? Allow me to ask: because without an answer everything again becomes usurpation, and the most ignorant,

On what then does commerce rest, since it is proven that, lacking a standard of value, exchange is never equal, although the law of proportionality is rigorous? It is here that liberty comes to the rescue of reason, and compensates for the failures of certainty. Commerce rests on a *convention*, the principle of which is that the parties, after having sought fruitlessly the exact relations of the objects exchanged, come to an agreement to give an expression reputed to be exact, provided that it does not exceed the limits of a certain tolerance. That conventional expression is what we call the *price*.

Thus, in the order of economic ideas, the truth is in the law, and not in the transactions. There is a certainty for the theory, but there is no criterion for practice. There would not even have been practice, and society would be impossible, if, in the absence of a criterion prior and superior to it, human liberty had not found a means to supply it by *contract*.

From economics, let us pass on to morals. Justice, according to Roman law, consists in rendering to each what is due to them, *suum cuique*. I will hold myself to that definition, in order to avoid all dispute.

The law of justice is absolute: the civil law, written or *usager*, rests on it. No one ever disputes the validity of that law: on the other hand, the world resounds with complaints against its applications. Where then is the criterion? I observed in my first letter that the maxim, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, is not an instrument for exact assessment, since it would be necessary to know what we should legitimately desire to be done to us. The economic formula that socialism substitutes for that ancient adage, *To each according to his capacity, to each capacity according to its product*, is more certain, since it poses at once the right and the duty, the benefit and its condition. But it is no more a criterion than the other, since, according to what has just been said about value, we never know exactly what a thing is worth, or what a man deserves.

make sacrifices and processions. It is to work at the deification of men, sometimes by the celebration of their virtues and beauties, sometimes by the execration of their ugliness and their crimes.

It is necessary then that the sculptor and the painter, like the singer, cover a wide diapason, that they show beauty by turns radiant and shadowed, across the whole extent of the social scale, from the slave to the prince, and from the plebs to the senate. You have only known how to paint the gods: it is necessary to represent the demons as well. The image of vice, like that of virtue, is as much within the domain of painting as of poetry: according to the lesson that the artist wants to give, every figure, beautiful or ugly, can carry out the aim of art.

Let the people, recognizing itself in its misery, learn to blush for its cowardice and to detest its tyrants; let the aristocracy, exposed in its oily, obscene nakedness, be lashed all over its body, in punishment for its parasitism, its insolence and its corruptions.¹⁵ Let the magistrate, the military man, the merchant, the peasant, let men of all the conditions of society, seeing themselves by turns in the heights of their dignity and their baseness, learn, by the glory and shame, to rectify their ideas, to correct their mores, and to perfect their institutions. And let each generation, registering thus on canvas and in marble the secret of its genius, arrive at posterity with no other blame or apology than the works of its artists.

This is how art must participate in the movement of society, how it must provoke it and follow it.

And it is for having misunderstood that goal of art, for having reduced it to nothing but an expression of a chimerical

labor, considered servile and ignoble among the ancients.

¹⁵ Our conservative public is not of that opinion. It is enough for it to be called *honest* and *moderate*; it wants to be made beautiful and to be believed such. An artist, who in their studio practice followed the principles of aesthetics formulated here, would be treated as seditious, driven from the ranks, deprived of State commissions, and condemned to die of hunger.

ideal, that Greece, elevated by fiction, would lose the knowledge of things and the scepter of ideas.

A time would come, oh Plato, when the Greeks, having put all beauty in the gods, would find themselves totally without it, and forget even the sentiment of it. A sad, coarse superstition taking hold then of their minds, one would see the descendants of those who had once worshiped such beautiful deities, prostrate themselves before a hoary and deformed god, covered in rags, the type of misery and ignominy;¹⁶ one would see them, for love of that idol, hate beauty, and make themselves vile and ugly according to their religious principles. The pious and holy would be recognized by their filth and vermin. Instead of poetry and the arts, inventions of sin, they would practice poverty, making a glory of begging. Gymnasiums, schools, libraries, theaters, academies, works and pomps of Satan, would be devastated and delivered to the flames: the image of a tortured martyr hanging on a gibbet would become for women the most precious of jewels. To be covered in ashes, to mortify oneself with abstinences, to exhaust oneself in prayers, to flee from study as profane and love as impure, that is what they would call the exercise (*asceticism*) of piety and penitence.

And that religion, that liturgy, those mysteries, oh Plato, that would be the religion of the *Logos*; and in the name of the *Logos*, reason would be detested, beauty cursed, art anathematized, philosophy and philosophers thrown into the flames and dedicated to the infernal gods.

Humanity then, bent under an infamous superstition, and believing itself odious and fallen, would be afflicted with a systematic and fatal degradation. There would be no more ideal, neither within man nor outside him: therefore, no more poetry, no more oratory, no more art, and especially no more science. As much as Greece had elevated itself with the worship of its

¹⁶ The Greeks, converted to Christianity, represent the Man-God as old, thin, suffering and ugly, in conformance with the text of Isaiah, ch. 53.

That we can know well the *law* of our thoughts, the *rule* of our actions, the *system* of our evolutions, the *course* of our institutions and of our mores; that we conform as best we can, in the exercise of our liberty, to that *law*, to that *rule*, to that *system*, to that *providential course*; that we can finally, in the practice of life, render equitable judgments, but that we can never render these judgments just. God himself could not do it. His reason, just like ours, only pronounces correctly on the ensemble, never on the details: on that condition only can one say, with the psalmist, that divine judgments are absolute, *justificata in semetipsa*.

Let us render this more sensible by some examples.

The idea of value is elementary in economics: everyone knows what is meant by it. Nothing is less arbitrary than this idea; it is the comparative relation of products that, at each moment of social life, make up wealth. Value, in a word, indicates a proportion.

Now, a proportion is something mathematical, exact, ideal, something which, by its high intelligibility, excludes caprice and fortune. There is then, on top of supply and demand, a *law* for comparison of values, therefore a *rule* of the evaluation of products.

But that law or rule is a pure idea, of which it is impossible, at any moment, and for any object, to apply precisely, to have the exact and true standard. Products vary constantly in quantity and in quality; the capital in the production and its cost vary equally. The proportion does not remain the same for two instants in a row: a criterion or standard of values is thus impossible. The piece of money, five grams in weight, that we call the *franc*, is not a fixed unity of values: it is only a product like others, which with its weight of five grams at nine-tenths silver and one-tenth alloy, is worth sometimes more, sometimes less than the franc, without us ever being able to know exactly what is its difference from the standard franc.

imental, positive, certain and, I dare say, without criterion. I will first explain this apparent paradox: you will see soon how, after the example of the Greeks, the moderns could put back into question the certainty of knowledge, and how their minds, incompletely purged of theological notions, fell again into the *criteriomania* of the ancients.

All that exists, I said in my first letter, is necessarily in evolution; everything flows, everything changes, modifies, and transforms itself unceasingly. Movement is the essential condition, almost the *material*, of being and thought. There is nothing fixed, stable, absolute, or invincible, except the very law of movement, that is the *relations* of weight, number, and measure, according to which all existence appears and conducts itself. Here, the philosophy of progress absorbs that of Pythagoras, and gives it its rank and character.

Thus, the entirety of the universe is identical and adequate to the entirety of the series or evolution. For example, the entirety of animal existence is contained in the period included between conception and death: the living being, in whatever moment of that period, is only a fraction of itself. It follows from this that all actuality is imperfect and unreal, always representing only a movement of the evolution, a term in the series, in short a fraction or approximation of existence, conveying only incompletely the law.

The law in itself is thus definite, and we can have an exact idea of it by successive observations of the partial manifestations that reveal it. But nothing sensible, nothing present, nothing real can ever represent it: such a realization, at a given hour, is contradictory. There is then no specimen of movement possible, no exact and authentic copy. The archetype, Plato said, is and always will be only an idea; no power knows how to obtain a standard.

If it is thus for existence considered in its plenitude, if reality exists only fractionally in relations and in things, it follows:

first gods, so much, under the yoke of its new Lord, it would

¹⁷ For art, there are, and really only can have been only two eras: the religious or idolatrous epoch, of which the Greeks furnished the highest expression, and the industrial or humanitarian epoch, which hardly seems to have begun. The century of Augustus was only a continuation of that of Pericles: art, passing from the service of the gods to that of the conquerors, began to decline, not with regard to finish or execution, but with regard to the conception of beauty. Such models as the emperors, the patricians and their wives! Such types as the lazy and ferocious plebs, the gladiators and praetorians! The Renaissance was in its turn, as the name indicates, only a pastiche. There is not, and there could never be a Christian art. Antiquity having been suddenly exhumed, one gave up the emaciated Christs, the angular and pale Madonnas for the Jupiters, Apollos and Venuses: the artists of Jules II and Léon X had no other inspirations. Also, that movement of an imitative art, a reversal for the tradition, without possible intelligence for the future, could not sustain itself: it was a scandal of luxury and curiosity. As one hardly believed anymore in Jesus and the Virgin, and today we no longer believe at all, one soon came to lose interest in their images; and that catholic carnival having passed, art found itself again completely empty, without principle, without object and without aim. The century of Louis XIV has been for us like that of Leo X had been for Italy, a *classical* exercise. It has passed quickly; and the more we see it move away, the more it seems to us below its reputation. At present, the world of arts and letters is, like the political world, given over to dissolution. We have had successively: under Louis XIV, the dispute of the ancients and the moderns; under Louis XV, that of the Piccinistes, and the Gluckistes; under the restoration, that of the classicals and the romantics; at the same time, the battles of faith and reason, of authority and liberty, the economic and constitutional controversies. In sixty-four years, there have been in the French government a dozen revolutions and sixteen *coups d'Etat* executed sometimes by power, and sometimes by the people. This certainly does not testify to a great political genius. What could literature and the arts be, alongside that anarchy? In 93, we were still *sensible*; today we are only sensual. I had intended to make that definition of woman. A jaded youth, without appetite and without heart, says to you: Woman is an object of art. So painting and sculpture are no longer anything but specialties in the pornography of the day. The artist can do what he likes, but he cannot fight against the model, the *tableau vivant*! Woman an object of art! It is not socialism which discovered that... I would like, for our more rapid regeneration, that the museums, cathedrals, palaces, salons and boudoirs, with all their ancient and modern furnishings, were thrown in the flames, with a prohibition of twenty years against the artists occupying themselves with their art. The past forgotten, we could make something.

be abased. For man does not raise himself up in reason and virtue, except as attracted by beauty: and his faith would consist of denying that beauty, which should make his joy and his triumph. An absolute and inexpressible god, manifested in a sickly and dishonored incarnation; man declared impure, deformed and vile from birth: once again, what aesthetic, what civilization could arise from that horrible dogma?

However, the decadence would not be eternal. These degenerate men would have learned two things, which would one day make them greater and better than their fathers: the first is that before God all men are equal; consequently that by nature and Providence there are no slaves; the second is that their duty and honor is to labor.

What neither gymnastics, nor politics, nor music, nor philosophy, bringing together their efforts, knew how to do, *Labor* will accomplish. As in the ancient ages the initiation to beauty came by way of the gods, so, in a remote posterity, beauty will be revealed anew by the laborer, the true *ascetic*, and it is from the innumerable forms of industry that it will demand its changing expression, always new and always true. Then, finally, the *Logos* will be manifested, and the human laborers, more beautiful and more free than the Greeks ever were, without nobles and without slaves, without magistrates and without priests, will form all together, on the cultivated earth, one family of heroes, thinkers and artists.¹⁷

XI.

Thus, sir, a single notion, the notion of Progress, restored to its rank on the intellectual clavier, is sufficient for me to demonstrate the reason of my doctrines and to reform from top to bottom all that our classical, domestic and religious education makes us consider as indubitable, definitive and sacred. Of all that we have learned, you and I, at the College, the Church, the

through the words of a spirit-medium, *fides ex auditu*, but by a contemplation that is direct and, so to speak, face-to-face, *sicuti est facie ad faciem*. To see truth in itself, on the sole guarantee of one's eyes and one's reason, is clearly to reject the hypothesis of a criterion: I am astonished that philosophy has not been able to understand that apologue. Such was, however, the thought of that multitude of religionists, contemporaries of Jesus and the apostles, who, under the general name of *gnostics*, knowers, stood up to the Church for more than six centuries, and disappeared completely only with the arrival of the Reformation.

Gnosticism, I have no doubt, would have soon suppressed Christianity, and become the universal religion, if it had shown itself more true to its name, if it had been more practical, more empirical, and less *illuminated*. But that supposed *gnosis* was five times more complicated, more mysterious, more hyperphysical that the emerging *faith* that it despised: so much so that, in his letters, Paul, the doctor *par excellence* of faith, the man of the transcendental criterion, treated the sublimities of the *gnosis* as old wives' tales, and heaped his sarcasm on them. Alas! The common sense is the last to arrive in the human mind, and he who is believed wise because he protests against a certain degree of superstition, is himself only superstitious in a more malign and incurable manner. Gnosticism, which only made an attempt at religious fusion, analogous to that which is attempted in our own times, was defeated as much by its own contradictions as by the real superiority of its adversary. Those who claimed to have a direct knowledge were persuaded to experience only the chimeras of their own brains; and now more than ever one will call for a preservative against the illusions of the encephalon. Thanks to them, science has been postponed for fifteen centuries. It would never have developed, if it had depended on the modern theosophists.

It was with Bacon and the Renaissance that science was formed, apart from the supernatural and the absolute, exper-

ceived. The cults are generally regarded as in solidarity as well; their cause is now common, and Edgard Quinet, in writing the *Génie des religions*, has clearly posited the principle of modern religiosity. The university is agreed in principle with the Jesuits, and the Pope can offer his hand to the sultan and the Grand Lama. The great reconciliation is accomplished, faith is one like the Logos, and the universal republic has found its criterion.

I fear, however, that this Christianity of poets and archeologists has only led to a mystification, and that by generalizing the criterion, they have lost it.

The Reformation said: All the faithful receive, by the baptism and communion, the Holy Spirit. All are, as a consequence, interpreters of the words of Christ: the canonical definition is useless.

Lamennais, Quinet, Mazzini and others add: All the peoples have received, by their individual initiations, the Holy Spirit; all cults are consequently versions of the Gospel, and the authority of these versions together takes precedent over that of the Church of Rome.

However you look at it, as soon as you reject special authority, in order to put in its place either individual sentiment, or, what amounts to the same thing, universal testimony, doesn't this break the link with faith, and make an appeal to reason? We thought we had secured our criterion: it has vanished.

Since we are forced to return to reason, let us see what it offers. Does it also have a criterion?

II.

Nothing new under the sun! Early on reason, under the name of science, knowledge, επιστημη, γνωσις, or under the more modest one of *philosophy*, aspiration to science, opposed itself to faith and claimed the possession of truth, no longer

Academy, the Palace, the Bourse, and the National Assembly, nothing persists, as soon as we examine it in the light of that inevitable notion, prior to every other, and for that reason least sensed and least perceived, of movement or Progress.

What if now, after having, with the aid of that notion of Progress, purged my brain, remade my judgment and renewed my soul, looking around me and considering the figures that surround me, I no longer find in other men, yesterday my counterparts, anything but contradictors, (I would almost say enemies)? Here, sir, you have to take account of that bellicose, aggressive style, for which many have reproached me, but of which I have not always been conscious, and about which I insist only that my adversaries and myself, imbued as we have been with different ideas, have not been able to understand each other. Someone said long ago that I have written only one line: There are in society only two parties, the party of movement and the party of resistance, the progressives and the absolutists. And yet, how few of the former do you know! How many, on the contrary do you not know of the second!

Absolutists of the first rank, are the false skeptics who, misunderstanding the law of intellectual movement and the essentially historical nature of truth, can see in human opinions only a heap of uncertainties, who unceasingly accuse philosophy of contradiction and society of inconsequence, and from the alleged impossibility of discovering truth and making it men accept it, conclude indifferently, some for *laissez-faire*, and others for whim, recognizing as seditious and culpable only discussion and liberty! As if truth in philosophy and politics could be anything but the chain of glimpses of the reason, and as if that chain, even if we manage to embrace it with the mind, can realize itself any way but in time and the series of institutions! As if the work of the philosopher and reformer, after having recognized the progression of ideas, did not consist solely of indicating by turns the various moments of the law, positing each day a new milestone on the great road of Humanity!... Pascal, who

was so greatly scandalized if the formula of right was made to vary even a degree from the meridian, and who wanted to render juridical reason uniform on the two sides of the Pyrenees,—Pascal, much more than Pyrrho, who is too maligned,—was the type of these absolutists.

Even more absolutist are those who, impatient with that perpetual mobility, want to settle civilization in a system, logic in a formula, and right in a plebiscite; who, taking conceptions for *principles*, claim to link all human activity exclusively to these principles, and, outside of their passionnal, hierarchic, dualist, trinitarian and communitarian fantasies, no longer perceive society, or morals, or common sense at all. As if each affirmation of the philosopher did not raise an equivalent negation; as if each decree of the sovereign, repealing the prior decree, did not posit in advance the decree that would repeal it!...

Absolutists, those would-be politicians who impose on society, like a yoke, their inflexible axioms, and order it to obey, whatever the cost, without taking any more account of the advance of ideas than of the backwardness of populations. Nothing is more ordinary, indeed, than a society that, at the very moment when it seeks certain reforms, lags behind the institutions that it is a question of abolishing. It is thus that the rigorists become as dreadful for it as the retrogrades.

The unity and perpetuity of power, says one, is the first of social laws. No salvation apart from a legitimate monarchy!

The kings are made for the people, responds another, not the people for the kings. No salvation apart from constitutional monarchy!

All reason in the same way: No salvation apart from the prerogation of the president, adds this one. No salvation apart from the constitution, adds that one. If a single accent is removed or added to it, all is lost!

Others, full of their theories on sovereignty, exclaim: The interests alone reign and govern. No salvation apart from the law of May 31! If there are more than seven million electors, should

Thus, following the Reformation, Christ is God, or nearly so; his teaching is sovereign, and as criterion, in the questions to which it can be applied immediately, it is infallible. As for the episcopal exegesis and the authority of the councils and the pope, the Reformation rejects them all as narrow, partial, subject to haste and to contradiction. In place of the Church, each of the faithful is invested with the right to read by himself the sacred text and to seek its sense. In other words, the evangelical criterion, which formerly only the Roman Church had had the right to use, has been put back in the hands of the baptized: such has been the result of the Reformation.

Lamennais, in his *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, puts it in a different way. According to that *Croyant*, God is revealed at all times to humanity, not only by the patriarchs, priests and prophets of the Old Testament, not only by Jesus and his Church, but by all the founders of religion: Zoroaster, Hermes, Orpheus, Buddha, Confucius, etc. All the moral and religious ideas that Humanity has possessed come from that single, permanent revelation. As the States of modern Europe are the product of Christianity, more or less adapted to particular circumstances and races, so the States of antiquity were the product of the primitive religion, professed by Adam, Noah, Melchizedek, etc. At base, the legislations, like the cults, are identical: all rest on an original communication from the Divinity. If one made an inventory of the political and religious institutions of all peoples, and separated the content from the form, one would obtain a code of perfectly homogeneous formulas, which one could regard as wisdom revealed from on high, the criterion of the human species.

Clearly this way of envisioning Christianity weakens it, in the sense that it folds it back into the general system of religious manifestations, and obliges it to fraternize with all the cults on which it has cast the anathema for so long. But, for all that it loses, one can say that it increases as well, creating a larger Catholicism than that which the first Christians con-

Provided with that faith, the Christian possesses, or believes he possesses, for all questions,—not only of theology, but of politics and morals, which do not come directly under common sense,—an instrument of control which excuses him from reflecting and even from thinking, and the use of which could not be more simple. It is only a matter of comparing the controversial questions, either with the words of Christ reported in the Gospels, or with the ecclesiastical interpretation, the value of which is equal for the Christian.

Every proposition that confirms the Gospel or that supports the Church is true;

Every proposition that refutes the Gospel or that condemns the Church is false;

Every proposition on which neither the Gospel nor the Church has pronounced is irrelevant.

The words of the messiah and the canonical definition are, for the Christian, the absolute truth, from which all other truth emanates. Here is, consequently, the criterion.

It is clear that such a judiciary process is nothing other than the tyranny of intelligence. Likewise, all governments, constituted on the divine type of the Church, are eager to imitate it. But reason protests: “That saying is hard!” Even in the presence of Jesus Christ the apostles said, *Durus est hic sermo!* For in the end, the Gospel has not said everything, or foreseen everything; as for the Church, it has so often and so scandalously failed! And what if I showed in a moment that the so-called criterion has never served to discern a single truth, to render a single judgment!...

Yet, instead of dismissing as doubtful the Christian criterion, we have first tried to render it more universal and exact. To correct the criterion of truth could pass for real folly: So what! There have been no means to do otherwise. And the thing was seen as no greater difficulty than a rectification of weights and measures.

they vote for serfdom and birthright, all is lost!—To which the reply is not long in coming: The right to suffrage is a natural and inalienable right. No salvation apart from the law of March 1849! If there are less than ten million registered voters, should they vote for community or empire, all is lost!...

These are the contradictions of absolutism! These are the debates with which the seven hundred fifty representatives occupy their days, those whom the people have chosen to oversee the maintenance of peace, to rule and compromise amicably to the satisfaction of many, if not all, of the general interests, to organize a system of concessions and reforms, the practice of freedom! The ignorant people are driven to civil war by their own representatives! Woe to us if they are saved by someone! Woe if they come to save themselves!...

Absolutists, finally, those who, while proclaiming a general law of progress and the need for transitions, were entirely unable to discern its direction, abusing words and ideas in order to change minds, and alternately lulling public opinion to sleep with their self-interested compromises or whipping up popular ardor, sometimes complaining that the century was below their genius, sometimes pushing it according to their impatience, and by their inability to lead it, driving it over precipices.

Thus, romantic literature, revolutionary in form, ultimately resulted in a retrograde issue. It could be useful to rescue from oblivion the poetry of the Middle Ages, to render some measure of esteem to the architecture of dungeons and cathedrals, but by reviving feudalism as a literary element, the romantics nullified, as far as they were able, the philosophical movement of the eighteenth century, and rendered the nineteenth century unintelligible. We owe them the better part of the reaction that greeted the Republic.

Thus eclecticism, with such honest intentions, with such an impartial critique, but with such timid views, so intent in its mediocrity, after having given a strong impetus to study, ended up in intolerance. With its psychology borrowed from

the Scots, and its theism from a bit of renovated Plato, it established a *cordon sanitaire* around the status quo. Catholicism owes to it the extension of its lease on life, and pays back the debt by eliminating it: is this not justice?

Thus, since 1830, while the publication of the theories of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, and the resurrection of the ideas of Babœuf have posed the social question so powerfully, the real question of the century, we have been distracted, led astray, deceived by a false democratic and doctrinaire liberalism. Under the pretext of loyalty to the traditions of 89 and 93, we have cast as much discredit as we could on the socialist theories; instead of aiding the investigation, we have suppressed it. Doubtless it was necessary to redeem and avenge the men of the grand epoch; the progress of our generation was accelerated by all the Justice which was rendered to

¹⁸ I have allowed this passage to remain, not in order to insult the misfortunes that I shared when it was written, but in order to respond to tireless calumnies. The thing that is especially pathetic about the *coup d'état* of December 2 is that the men it has most cruelly struck are exactly those who appear to understand it the least. We want to see only the instrument, the occasion, the pretext, if I dare put it this way, the *strings*: we obstinately refuse to recognize the cause. The cause is the terror caused by a revolution of which the character, the measure and the end was distorted; it is the retrograde direction of opinion, the obstinate resistance of the parties, the machiavelianism of the Legislature, the division of the republicans, of which some, in the majority, wanted the republic without the revolution, or the revolution without socialism, the word without the thing, while the others were forced to protest against that absurd politics, or else suicide; it is above all the appeal to popular instincts, under the most unfortunate circumstances, under the name of *universal suffrage*. For my part, I confess, if I am worried for the sake of freedom, if sometimes I have doubts about the future of democracy, is because I see its defenders, martyrs of a vain formula, turn furiously upon the social revolution, having become indifferent to ideas, not understanding that the proliferation of socialist theories is precisely what makes it strong, so that some join the Orléanists, for shame! ... or indulge in chimerical projects, denounced as quickly as they are conceived! May they finally wake up ... On the day they abandon their deadly path, freedom will not be far away; in France, there will only be a prejudice to bring down.

is always assumed; it is by virtue of that very assumption that philosophy exists, and opposes itself to faith. The negation of the criterion, in philosophy, is the strangest thing imaginable...

I hope, sir, that that negation will soon seem most natural to you, and that you will see in it, with me, not the condemnation, but the glory of science.

I.

Saint Paul said: Faith is the argument for things unseen, that is, things which are without evidence or intuitive certainty, *argumentum non apparentium*. Now, unseen things form the majority of the objects that occupy the mind and consciousness of men. This means, according to the Apostle, that we know nothing, or almost nothing, of the things of the universe and of humanity, except by faith. It is thus that faith has become a criterion for the human mind.

All societies begin from here, and, surprisingly perhaps in our epoch of discussion and doubt, the mass, in which I include the University and the State, has no other rule. In doubtful questions, and all practical questions are of that sort, most men know only faith. If they follow reason, it is without knowing it; for, I repeat, they do not conceive of reason without a decree, or philosophy without a criterion.

Let me explain this.

The Christian believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent to earth and born of a virgin to teach men the truths necessary for political order, domestic society and personal salvation.

He believes that this Christ has transmitted his powers to his Church, that he is with it permanently through the Spirit which he has communicated to it, and that by virtue of that continued revelation, the Church rules worship and morals with an infallible authority.

SECOND LETTER: ON CERTAINTY AND ITS CRITERION

Sainte-Pélagie, December 1, 1851.

Sir,

The question that you pose to me in your second letter could not be more judicious, and if I have not addressed it first, it is because it seemed to me to pertain to the circle of proofs and justifications that I would have to furnish later, not the general outline that I needed to make for you. Since you ask, I can no longer refuse your wish, and I am going to try, if I can, to explain myself clearly on this difficult matter.

The problem of certainty is most certainly within the domain of philosophy: the theory of Progress admits it as well, and that theory alone, in my opinion, can resolve it in a satisfactory manner. But certainty is one thing; what the Greeks called *κριτήριον*, the *criterion* of certainty, is another. Certainty is, as I just said, rational and philosophical by right; the alleged *criterion* is only an importation from theology, a prejudice of religious faith without sense within the limits of reason, and is even, from the point of view of the intellectual movement which constitutes reason, a contradictory hypothesis.

But, you ask, how do you conceive of certainty without a criterion? And if certainty cannot be conceived without a criterion, how, without that means of discernment and of guarantee, is science possible? How, with regard to certainty, can faith be more favored than reason? It is precisely contrary to what

them. But was it necessary to take them for models, to impose on ourselves their practices and prejudices? In this moment, it is socialism that the so-called revolutionary coteries, who are all most insurrectionary, blame all the evil since 1848 on the revolution. They say that if socialism, if the revolution had not existed, the revolution would not have brought about the counter-revolution!... Also, and do not mistake it, that old democracy aspires only to save society from socialism one last time, and regrets not having saved it better in 1848. Thanks to that absurd distinction between the socialist party and the revolutionary party a handful of dictators have sworn, as one says in his patriotic zeal, the extermination of socialism, the suppression of Progress! Do you know where the blindness of the neo-Jacobins would push us? To a reaction without limits, of which they would not be the heroes, but the victims, but of which, to top off their misery, they also would not have the right to complain, since they would have been its accomplices...¹⁸

Progress is to know, to foresee. Those who were charged with realizing progress in 1848 were all, for various reasons, men of *the past*: is it surprising that they have not known how to make the future? Convinced today by their own confessions of having seen in the revolution only a change of functionaries, they have brought on themselves a fatal decline. Any attempt to return, that would not justify an explicit conversion, would be a crime on their part.

Liberty is wealth; it is nobility. We have cast the electoral right to the *meurt-de-faim*, as Bridaine said; they have responded like slaves. What is astonishing about that? Let the proletariat vote in 52 as it did in 48, on an empty stomach, and soon we will all be in servitude, and French democracy, refuted by its own principle, without flag and without program, will have ceased for a time to be a reality.

Forced in 1848 to fight for my defense and for the revolutionary affirmation, I soon recognized, by the annoyance that

new ideas raised in the democratic party, that the moment had not come; and I have made all my efforts to conceal an antagonism which from now on serves no purpose, and work a necessary reconciliation between the laboring class and the bourgeois. I believe by that to have made an act of good politics, and above all of progress. When the parties show themselves unanimously refractory, they can only be revolutionized by one means, fusion...

You have, sir, my profession of faith. I have never written it before; I confess that I have rarely even reflected on it. I have been carried by the current of my century. I have gone forward without ever turning around, affirming movement, seeking the totality of my ideas, denying the analytic conceptions, sustaining the identity of ontology and logic, showing liberty to be above even religion,¹⁹ pleading in the name of justice the cause of the waged and the poor, defending equality, or rather the progressive equation of functions and destinies; in addition, believing little in disinterestedness, holding martyrdom in low esteem despite my imprisonment, thinking that amity is fragile, reason vacillating, conscience doubtful, and regarding charity, brotherhood, attractive labor, women's liberation, legitimate government, divine right, perfect love and happiness, as travesties of the Absolute.

If I have, unbeknownst to myself, in the heat of polemic, in bad faith from party spirit, or in any other way, been unfaithful to this doctrine, it is a *lapsus calami* on my part, an argument *ad hominem*, a failure of mind or of heart, that I disavow and retract.

¹⁹ A Voltairean who had great fear of the devil, the prince of Ligne, said fifty years ago: "Atheism lives in the shadow of religion."—Since then, things have advanced, and the roles are reversed: religion lives in the shadow of the State. Now, ask Odilon Barrot what is the doctrine of the State in matters of faith? His response, better than any I could give, will demonstrate to the urgency of a principle which could serve at once as the foundation of religion, that is of morals, and of the State.

Besides, that philosophical humility costs me little. The idea of progress is so universal, so flexible, so fecund, that he who has taken it for a compass almost no longer needs to know if his propositions form a body of doctrine or not: the agreement between them, the system, exists by the mere fact that they are in progress. Show me a philosophy where a similar security is to be found!... I never reread my works, and those that I wrote first I have forgotten. What does it matter, if I have *moved* for twelve years, and if today I still advance? What could a few lapses, or some false steps, detract from the rectitude of my faith, the goodness of my cause?... You will please me, sir, to learn for yourself what road I have traveled, and how many times I have fallen along the way. Far from blushing at so many spills, I would be tempted to boast of them, and to measure my valor by the number of my contusions.

I am, sir, etc.