The Saint-Simonians and the birth of social justice in France

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Abstract:

This paper concerns the birth of the idea of social justice, which in France dates to the 19th century. It argues that the idea of social justice was able to emerge in France due to particular conditions, which were met for the first time by the Saint-Simonians. We first shed light on the transition in France from a commercial system to one marked by increasing industrialization, which raised new questions regarding economic justice and the composition of ownership. The Saint-Simonians were among the first to criticize this new composition, and to seek a means to organize society on a fair basis. We then explain how the Saint-Simonians came to theorize this new organization: according to them, the value of things lies in work. The difference from the classical framework, which is also utilitarian, is that they posit an opposition between workers and idlers: each and every individual must be useful to society. Finally, we analyse how the Saint-Simonians identify this opposition as existing throughout history, on which basis they not only justify their innovative views on social justice, but legitimize their project as a whole.

Keywords:
Saint-Simonianism, Social justice, Ability, Industrialism

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Working Paper

LUTZ Adrien[1] - The Saint-Simonians and the birth of social justice in France

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1. Introduction

The system of industrial production appeared in France during the 19th century. This phenomenon led not only to an improvement of social conditions but also to an increase of inequalities. Faced with this dual result, new issues arose concerning economic justice. Indeed, the sharp increase in wealth could now allow everyone access to a social minimum of final goods, assistance, and opportunities: as noted by Johnston, "during the nineteenth century an enormously influential and eclectic assortment of thinkers discovered a new peak from which to survey the terrain of justice" (2011: 167).[2]

According to Fleischacker (2004a), the idea of social justice, the modern form of distributive justice, has its roots in Hume (1738, 1748) and Smith (1759, 1762–64, 1766, 1790). With Miller (1999), Fleischacker distinguishes traditional theories of distributive justice based upon criteria such as merit (from Aristotle to Smith), from modern theories of distributive justice based upon egalitarian views (based on Rawls 1971 but also Dworkin 1981a, 1981b and Sen [1979] 1980). Johnston (2011) proposes a different thesis, although one that is complementary: social justice appears only when each individual is seen as deserving of equal consideration (bearing equal worth), and when she is able to impact her social environment (expressing intentional designs). This new vision of justice focuses on a person's living conditions without any regard for her age, social status, and so on.

The key point here is that the emergence of this new vision has not yet been sufficiently studied by political philosophers and economic historians. Indeed, the social thinkers who contributed to this emergence—thinkers deeply concerned with issues such as poverty and unemployment—have been forgotten, even though many adopted approaches that lie at the basis of the traditions of social justice in France (Frobert 2014) and Belgium (Cunliffe and Erreygers 2008).[3] Hence, the birth of the idea of social justice is a topic that lacks clarity, with authors failing to agree on the date or place at which the birth took place. This could be

[2] See also Miller (1999), Raphael (2001), and Stedman-Jones (2004).

[3] For instance, Fleischacker narrows social thought to the redistribution of wealth: "there are any number of nineteenth-century books with the title 'Distribution of Wealth,' or some close variant thereof. There were also a number of political movements in the nineteenth century that saw the redistribution of wealth as a principal task for government. Yet the phrase 'distributive justice' seems not to have become widespread until after the second World War" (2004a: 80).

explained by two facts: first, the study of contextual sources has not been a major concern of political philosophers working on social justice. Second, historians of ideas have paid little attention to the idea of social justice or to its birth; we argue, nevertheless, that history does indeed provide sufficient material to enable us to understand how the idea was born. An examination of the sources indicates that the Saint-Simonians (1825–1832) are the founders of the idea of social justice in France.[4]

The emergence of the idea of social justice needs to be put in its proper economic context: the generation of enough wealth to meet the needs of every member of an industrializing society. This happens only at the end of the 18th century in England and at the beginning of the 19th in France. As argued by Aron (1966) and Musso (2010), unlike Smith who knew only of commercial societies, Saint-Simon was an observer of the past and also the herald of a promising future. Nevertheless, he never provided explicit considerations of social justice: only the Saint-Simonians dealt with such matters. France remains poorly studied despite the plethora of social thinkers who pondered what would become the *social question*, dealing with concerns about the cost of the standard of living especially for the poor (Blanc, Constant, Fourier, Guizot, Saint-Simon, Sismondi). What we now call the social question would become an important issue for social thinkers from the 1840s onwards; however, the Saint-Simonians were using this term already in 1831 (*Le Globe*).

Saint-Simonianism opened up new prospects in France, based upon a slogan which would inspire successive thinkers (Blanc, Proudhon, Walras, Marx) in many different ways: *à chacun selon sa capacité, à chaque capacité selon ses œuvres* (to each according to his ability, to each ability according to his works).[5] The Saint-Simonians endeavoured to raise

[4] Their master Saint-Simon (1760–1825) is studied by Johnston but omitted by Fleischacker (who prefers Rousseau and Babeuf and focuses on the 18th century).

[5] Saint-Simonianism is commonly studied as a stream of thought *per se* (see for instance Boureille and Zouache, 2009, 2010; Manuel 1962; Mason 1931; and Picon 1992). This stream of thought is unified around one common *Doctrine* (2 volumes were published during two years of work: 1828–1829 and 1829–1830) in which they use the term "school" even though the movement collapsed in 1831 because of the rise of the religious strand. After the schism some of them became Fourierists (Abel Transon, Jules Lechevalier), Republicans (Pierre Leroux), or followed Napoléon III (Michel Chevalier). One may assume that Faccarello and Steiner (2008b), Halévy (1901), and Schumpeter (1954) distinguish Auguste Comte from the Saint-Simonians, but we argue that no clear dissension appeared in *Le Producteur* regarding social justice during that period (1825–1827). There is no need

awareness of their ideas in a massive body of work including three journals (*Le Producteur*, *Le Globe*, *L'Organisateur*) and a compendious exposition of their *Doctrine* (see the translation and a scientific introduction by Georg Iggers [1958] 1972).[6] They put forward a doctrine that can be summed up as follows: the accumulation of capital enables the improvement of a growing part of the population under the constraint that everyone has access to the means of production. In this respect, the mobility of these means is key. Ensuring fair access to the means of production appears to be a solution to injustice and idleness. More than within commercial societies, new questions arise from industrialisation that lie at the root of the idea of social justice.

We first aim to show how French society evolved as a result of industrialisation, and above all how this raised new questions regarding ownership. We also discuss the composition of property rights, the core of the Saint-Simonian concerns (2). Indeed, the need for such a discussion is rooted in the specific nature of the Saint-Simonian theory of value, and paves the way for considerations of social justice. It also paves the way for the second strand of their criticism of ownership: the necessity to adopt a new ethical criterion appropriate for industrializing society (3). Finally, these views are based upon a specific law—the progress of the human mind—from which results their desire to provide new institutions. Such new institutions need to track the evolution of societies from commerce to industry (4).

2. Social justice and the composition of property rights

At the beginning of industrialisation, wealth and improvement in production processes were balanced by pauperization and the sharp increase in inequalities. Enlightened by Hont and Ignatieff's theories (1983) on commercial societies, this paradox led the Saint-Simonians to

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to distinguish them on this point. We opt to refer to them all by their names (Buchez, Comte, Laurent…) instead of a collective reference to *Le Producteur* as we believe it adds clarity.

[6] *Le Producteur* (January 1825–December 1826), *L'Organisateur* (August 1829–August 1831), and *Le Globe* (November 1830–April 1832) are the most famous Saint-Simonian journals, although *L'Organisateur Belge* (May–November 1831) and *Les Feuilles Populaires* (March–June 1832) were also published after the controversy. See also Reybaud (1843: 262–264), the complete edition of the works of Saint-Simon in 2012, and digitized Saint-Simonian economic texts on the Jean Monnet University scientific website. The *Doctrine* was edited in 2 volumes (*DSS*, *DSS2*). Only the first one was translated by Iggers.

inquire into the nature and the causes of poverty as applied to industrialization. In this respect, they clearly identified certain key social issues: the underlying roots of poverty lay in the unequal access to the means of production (tools but also machines, soil and financial resources). Then, according to the Saint-Simonians, the egalitarian spirit of the French Revolution added the thought that the economic progress produced by industrialization ought to give everyone the means to improve their social condition. But this was not the case: the new distribution of property still favoured the minority.

2.1 From commercial to industrial societies: the rise of social concerns

The division of labour (within and between workshops) and the introduction of machines in England—and then in France—were the two major features of industrialization in reaction to which Saint-Simonianism developed. Adding to the growing importance of trade, capital—namely the means of production—was accumulating so as to generate great wealth. The point was that this creation only concerned a small part of the members of society. Industrial society had replaced commercial society (Steiner 2006a), and pauperization remained a structural problem that was increasingly being called into question. This is the basis of French social thought, developed by a heterogeneous group of authors: Saint-Simon (1816–18), Sismondi (1819), the Saint-Simonians (1830), Cabet (1840), Blanc (1839), Fourier (1829), Pecqueur (1842).

At the turn of the 19th century the ability of this new system of production to provide enough subsistence for all was called into question by Malthus (1798). These concerns also crossed the Channel. For instance, in the French journal *La Décade*, with which the *idéologues* spread Smithian ideas, Seignette (1802) commented on the work of Bentham with an evocative title ("Situation and relief of the Poor," 1797) and worried about the sharp increase in the numbers of the poor (Vatin 2006). In the same evocative manner, Lemontey entitled his book *Influence morale de la division du travail, considéré sous le rapport de la conversation du gouvernement et de la stabilité des institutions sociales* (Moral influence of the division of tasks considered in relation to the subject of government and social institutions stability). As noted by Cohen (1966), Lemontey posed an interesting question: "beside all these sources of prosperity, I see charities increasing. Is the presence of the remedy, a clue to the evil?" ([1802] 1816, 187). Finally, Napoleon's continental blockade (1806–1814) and commercial

crises (1811–15, 1825)[7] paved the way for a reformist thought based upon Smithian political economy. Hence in 1819 Sismondi worried about the English system, which he considered dangerous, and called for *New principles of political economy* ([1827] 1971).[8] In this context Saint-Simonianism provided a doctrine framed around the major figure of the producer (explaining the title of their first journal, *Le Producteur*) and based upon the work of their master Saint-Simon (1760–1825). Hence, worries about poverty were increasing at that time: the paradox of growing wealth faced with increasing inequalities lies at the core of French social thought, which reached its climax in the 1840s and specifically the French revolution of 1848.

These economic changes must be linked with the spirit of the French Revolution, which furnished the intellectual condition for the emergence of the idea of social justice, namely a spirit favourable to equality. From the birth of the idea of social justice emerged the need for a secular institution (Fleischacker 2004a) able to provide social goods. During the 18th century the French state was perfectly able to provide such a task (assistance, opportunities).

The increase in social concerns was spurred by the French Revolution of 1789, with its focus on equality between people. The egalitarian spirit of the French Revolution, and mostly its desire to reject privileges, prompted the major social transformations provided by economic liberalism. The Revolution of 1789 thus gave birth to a whole movement of reforms in favour of political and economic liberalism and, in the end, industrialisation. The ending of privileges (1789) was the first step. By establishing individual property, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789) organized society into two levels: a private sphere where each citizen has a right to a minimum of liberty, and a public arena that makes the French Republic one and indivisible. The weights and measures standardization (1790), the Code du Commerce (1807), the Le Chapelier law (1791), and new forms of economic activity (workshop, patent) strongly favoured French economic development and industrialization by designing a homogenous market.

[7] On commercial crises, see Vivier (2011).

[8] Sismondi's thought changed after having read Say's *De l'Angleterre et des Anglais* in 1815 (see comments by scientific editors in vol. 4 of the complete economic works of Sismondi in 2015). On Sismondi and commercial crises, see Arena (2013).

The fact that the Saint-Simonians clearly understood that society evolves from a commercial shape to one based on production is worth recalling, as it prompts the emergence of new questions that find their roots in the emergence of the *prolétaire*, a term first used in 1816 by Saint-Simon ([1816–8] 2012: 1448). A *prolétaire* is someone without any right to property. Hence, from social distinction based upon inequalities before the law, there gradually emerge social distinctions based upon economic inequalities concerning access to property and means of production.

Before the French Revolution, land was already broken up into small rural properties and inheritance was limited as well. Then the ability to make a living from agriculture was restricted, and many workers had to work into workshops. This was the moment at which the figure of the *prolétaire* appeared: those who have no land nor means of production. During the 18th century, and then more so during industrialisation, levels of access to property rose but remained limited, casting aside many workers. This inequality led to considerations of social justice not because it was unjust in itself but because it raised questions about the social fate of the non-owners. In the absence of any land, how would the non-owners succeed in improving their fate and escaping poverty? Here stands the first and major feature of the material conditions of social justice: inequality of access to the means of production.

Although agriculture was the major sector at that time, industrialization enabled many people to work. The *prolétaires* who were not able to work in the field then went to the cities. Crucially, however, once they managed to find a workshop which needed more hands, the wages they received were only just sufficient for them to live. Here stands the second feature of the material condition of social justice: inequality between the task provided and the remuneration received.

However, the historical sources show us that, faced with the rise of poverty and recurrence of commercial crises, these reforms were deeply criticized by French social thinkers. For instance, in Gracchus Babeuf's journal *Le Tribun* (1794–97) we find recurrent attacks on the composition of property. Such an intellectual movement had its roots in the egalitarian views of this journal, but also drew on the parable of the bees and hornets by Saint-Simon (1818–16), and was finally consecrated in Proudhon's famous *Qu'est-ce que la propriété ?* (1840). while Babeuf never shaped a theory of social justice, since industrialization was not yet that

advanced in France, this is not the case for the Saint-Simonians.[9] Indeed, they were well aware of the powerful ability of industry to provide enough wealth to enable everyone to survive.

According to the Saint-Simonians, the French Revolution was supposed to favour a fair transfer of property to everyone. As Rouen complained in an article about the *Société commanditaire*, with the French Revolution industry had lost not only its impediments but also its guides (Rouen 1825a, 1825b; see also the 7th session of the *Doctrine*). Hence Rouen worried about free competition and uncertainty, and in this respect a *Société commanditaire* would be able to provide enough safety. Amongst all reforms presented above, historical inquiry shows that the most important for understanding Saint-Simonianism is the Code du Commerce (1807). Indeed, the Commercial Code detailed two kinds of companies: the general partnership, *Société en nom collectif*; and a limited partnership entity called *Société en commandite*. In the former case, each of the two or more partners have unlimited liability for legal actions and also for debts. It was the latter kind which particularly interested the Saint-Simonians, as the advantage of the *Commandite* was that it enables companies with limited funds to raise more capital from "passive" capital owners (in other words, what the Saint-Simonians would define as idle capitalists).[10]

Finally, post-revolutionary reforms to property and inheritance law remained insufficient to counterbalance a movement in favour of liberalism and the bourgeoisie. The issue the Saint-Simonians aimed to solve was then access to the means of production (and alongside this the question of the composition of property). In other words, considerations of social justice emerged in the Saint-Simonian view via reflection on opportunities, namely access to the means of production. Following the logic of rationalization (Mason 1931), the Saint-Simonians aimed to apply social utility as a goal: everyone had to contribute according to their abilities. Those who refused to contribute were then idlers.

[9] We shall also notice that the modern idea of distributive justice, social justice, deals with notion of distribution by a secular institution that seems hard to link with the communitarianism (or communism) of Babeuf. For further information on Babeuf and justice see Fleischacker (2004a: 77–79).

[10] At the really beginning of *Le Producteur* (issues no. 1 and no. 3) Rouen wrote two articles where he explained not only the consequences of the French Revolution for industry but also the functioning of the *Société en Commandite* in order to convince the readers of *Le Producteur* to try it (Rouen 1825a, 1825b). *Le Producteur* presented Saint-Simonian intellectual ideas and concrete projects as well.

2.2 The composition of property rights in question

As major contributors to production, workers ought to own their own tools, which would entitle them to fairer remuneration (this also explains the Saint-Simonian emphasis on *Commandite*). The diversion of wealth into the hands of an inactive minority sharply contributes to growing inequalities. In this respect, Saint-Simonianism represents a claim for justice, since those who contribute should have a right to remuneration for the entirety of their work. The point is that owners do not *produce*, they only *own* tools. They consume without producing. According to the Saint-Simonians, this is not a sufficient basis for a right to remuneration.

The Saint-Simonian theory of social justice finds its roots in their criticisms of the composition of property. Saint-Simon and his disciples used the term 'the composition of property' (*constitution de la propriété*) in a very specific way referring to the several forms taken by ownership throughout history (see for instance Saint-Simon [1816–8] 2012). To be clear, the Saint-Simonians never argued against ownership of tools itself, but rather that the minority did not deserve such ownership.

This is explained by the fact that ownership is a function. Unlike in Locke's thought ([1689b] 1982 ; [1689b] 1997) or to a lesser extent in Smith's (*LJ*), here there is no direct link between objects and individuals: there is no natural link, nor is there a contract. Ownership evolves throughout history, passing through several epochs. In Hume's thought, ownership has no substantive basis since it is only related to habit: ownership emerges by convention (see for instance Panichas 1983). The Saint-Simonians are not far from this, since for them ownership is a function (cf. The globe): that is why they will say that all individuals are *fonctionnaires*, namely people with a function, like an organ in a body.

According to Saint-Simon, the establishment of property had always been, and will always be, the basis of society. For instance, in *L'Industrie* ([1816–8] 2012) Saint-Simon had already argued that the degree of perfection is to be measured according to the institution of property. Indeed, after Turgot, Condorcet, and Smith, Saint-Simon distinguished historical epochs according to the degree to which property is considered the basis of social organization. Thus

from the Greek and Roman empires to the Middle Ages, slavery was the major system of ownership; then the soil became the basis, until the emergence of mobile property that enabled the emancipation of Communes. After the French Revolution, the last remnants of the *ancien régime* had to disappear: inheritance, the transmission of material wealth, would be replaced by ability.[11] In the *Doctrine*, the Saint-Simonians focused on the three major features of property: nature, use, and transfer (see the 7th session in *DSS*). The core of Saint-Simonianism was their argument against the transmission of property. This is why they aimed to discuss the composition of property.

The Saint-Simonian theory of transfer is multidimensional, since it refers to transfers between both generations and sectors. Regarding inter-temporal transfers, any claims from family members other than children are excluded. The goal here is definitely to remove inheritance, even for close family members. The right of property has to be transferred to workers according to ability: the most able should be entitled to access more means. Regarding inter-sectorial transfers, it is worth recalling that the influence of the economic context is important, mostly in respect to commercial crises and the debates about gluts. The Saint-Simonian view, through its focus on efficiency, proposes an entire system of communication (fluvial and terrestrial) in order to increase the capacity of the economic system to provide the necessary subsistence to all.

Industrialization strongly increased the ability of the economic system to provide subsistence for all, although wages or at least access to subsistence were seen as insufficient for the greater part of the population. In the Saint-Simonian view, this was due to a dearth of organisation rather than the avarice of the *chef d'ateliers*. If workers owned their own tools and were entitled to full remuneration for their work (except for some social part in favour of the community as a whole), then such inequality would disappear. As we have noted, Saint-

[11] The Saint-Simonians are not the only thinkers to consider ability: according to Guizot, the political organization should be based upon abilities, which means that the political actors should also be the most able citizens. These meritocratic views are not in themselves new. François Guizot, for instance, emphasises the importance of *political* abilities (Rosanvallon 1985). The same is true for François Huet, here concerning the links between ability as a power and its links with social liberty (Spitz 2007, see also Cunliffe and Erreygers 2008). The point is that one of the major Saint-Simonian contributions is to consider the whole production-based economy through the prism of ability: from politics to economics, *ability* acquires the status of a criterion upon which society should be organised. Being *able* means being apt to contribute to the social utility, at not only the political level but also, and primarily, at the economic one.

Simonianism is based upon the works of Saint-Simon, who in *De la réorganisation de la société Européenne* had stated that ownership should be based upon talent:

> It is true that it is property that gives government stability, but it is only when property is not separated from the rights that government can rest firmly on it. It is therefore appropriate that the government [...] should involve in the ownership those of the non-owners who a brilliant merit distinguishes, so that talent and possession may not be divided, for the talent which is the greatest strength, and the most active strength, would soon invade the property if it were not united with it. (Saint-Simon [1814] 2012: 1270–71)[12]

Nothing is intangible except the law of progressivity of the human spirit. However, the evolution of property relations, its composition, shows the degree of progress of a society. Moreover ownership ought to be modified in line with social changes: "the new conventions by which society might be consolidated its regeneration had to be preserved" (*DSS*: 128). In this, the Saint-Simonians never argue against Grotius and Pufendorf, for instance, who write that ownership is a social convention. They only add that the composition of the property should contribute to the improvement of the social and physical lot of the most numerous and poorest class. As Saint-Simon puts it, the fundamental basis of social organisation lies in property. The point is that the present composition has been arranged in such a way that it goes against the interest of the majority. Property thus has to be re-constituted according to the interests of the most numerous and poorest class. The best way to do this remains to facilitate the transfer of the means of production.

The Saint-Simonians saw clearly that the growing industrialization of England and France would not be consistent with a system of the natural convergence of interests. The Saint-Simonian conception of industrialism thus differed from liberal industrialism (see also Faccarello and Steiner 2008). Indeed, like many other economists, the Saint-Simonians were

[12] Il est vrai que c'est la propriété qui fait la stabilité du gouvernement, mais c'est seulement lorsque la propriété n'est point séparée des lumières, que le gouvernement peut reposer solidement sur elle. Il convient donc que le gouvernement appelle dans son sein et fasse participer à la propriété ceux des non-propriétaires qu'un mérite éclatant distingue, afin que le talent et la possession ne soient point divisés, car le talent qui est la plus grande force, et la force la plus agissante, envahirait bientôt la propriété s'il n'était point uni avec elle.

deeply influenced by Adam Smith. Through their doctrine, the division of labour becomes social and spreads to encompass the whole of society, with the aim of improving the productive structures and achieving a better distribution of commodities. On this point, the Saint-Simonians share the views of the liberal industrialists (Comte, Dunoyer, Say). Their focus on industrialisation and its social benefits comprises a common ground that sheds light on their intellectual affinities. One significant example would be the controversy on commercial gluts and general overproduction crises: while Sismondi and Malthus were opposed to Say's view on this matter, the Saint-Simonians adopt the same view as Say, arguing that an improvement of the channels of production—a better organization of production—would avoid gluts.

The concept of organization needs here to be precisely defined, as Jean-Baptiste Say, a liberal republican economist, never completely denied the importance of state intervention but provided a framework where the State remains in the background.[13] The Saint-Simonian case remains more complex, since even though they share his views on gluts and mobility, they differ on the best way to attain this mobility. From this controversy an interesting feature of Saint-Simonianism emerges: they postulate that under the constraint of increasing the mobility of the *instrumens de production* and commodities, the entire economic system is able to provide subsistence for all. For this purpose, *Le Producteur* is full of articles about industrial innovation. Saint-Simonianism is industrialism.

We may thus observe that there is no liberal theory of social justice in France at the beginning of the 19th century. The first attempt at framing such theory can be credited to the Saint-Simonians, who clearly grasped the paradox of commercial societies: the appearance of a dyadic relationship between economic development and increasing inequalities. The Saint-Simonian contribution on this issue remains their analysis of an economy based on industrial production which follows an era of trade. However, increasing industrial production was not a sufficient condition for improving the fate of the most numerous class, the less well-endowed members of society. To understand this deficiency it is necessary to analyse the relationship between production and value.

[13] See for instance his chapter entitled "On the effect upon national wealth, resulting from the productive efforts of public authority" in his *Treatise*.

3. Theory of value and the opposition between workers and idlers

The Saint-Simonian criticisms of property have their roots in their labour theory of value, and primarily the rejection of "productive agency". The Saint-Simonians were deeply inspired by Smith's framework of the division of labour and they seek to combine this with industrialization. The point we stress here is the specific nature of their theory of labour value.

3.1 From a classical framework…

Notably, the Saint-Simonians reject Jean-Baptiste Say's idea of productive agency. Then, like Ricardo ([1817] 1975), they refuse to include rent into the production costs, although they reject his theory of diminishing returns. This distinctive element of their doctrine becomes its founding element: the triptych wage, rent, and profit is replaced by a dichotomy based on work, namely the distinction between workers and idlers. The Saint-Simonian theory of value prefigures an antagonism regarding the composition of property: an antagonism between the owners of the means of production (*instrumens de production*), and those who only have their bodies—the non-owners, the *prolétaires*—namely, the "workers" in the classic sense.[14]

Agreeing with Ricardo (1819), the Saint-Simonians rejected both utility and production costs as bases of value: the price of goods depends solely on the quantity of labor required to obtain them.[15] Only embodied labour should be taken into account. This implies, according to Enfantin (1825a), that rent is a monopoly and pays a portion of value to the consumer that is not part of the necessary price of things.

[14] In *Le Producteur* the Saint-Simonians preferred to use the word "worker" instead of "prolétaire" even though they used the latter at some scattered points (see Enfantin 1826f). It is later in *Le Globe* that "prolétaire" is more often used.

[15] We should note this interesting passage which Ricardo deleted in a later edition: "If we ask M. Say in what riches consist, he tells us the possession of objects having value. If we then ask him what he means by value; he tells us that things are valuable in proportion as they possess utility. If again we ask him to explain to us by what means we are to judge of the utility of objects, he answers, by their value. Thus then the measure of value is utility, and the measure of utility is value" (Ricardo 1817: 390).

The specific nature of their analysis of value finds its source in the rejection of the concept of the productive service of soil. More precisely, the Saint-Simonians here appear close to Smith, and in opposition to Say they advance a labour value theory that rejects utility as the foundation of value. For instance, the Saint-Simonian Rodrigues (1825) defined value as the application of muscular and mental faculties to a particular object (soil, capital, and so on).

One specific difference with Smith is the Saint-Simonian focus on the concept of ability or faculty. We note that Say also used such a notion in his *Treatise* (1803), and defined the productive faculties by "the aptitude of *industrious*, *capitalists* and *natural agents* to cooperate in the production by giving *utility* to things. We could and we should deal with productive faculties of man but also productive faculties of capital and soil" ([1819] 2006: 1110). Using the 4th edition of the *Treatise*, the Saint-Simonians rejected this idea: soil in itself cannot produce value, only human action does. By their focus on labour, one may argue that the Saint-Simonians followed the tradition of Smith, Locke, and Galiani (Dooley 2005). The truth is though Saint-Simonianism is a doctrine of *direct* access to Nature, based on the application of reason to it. As shown above, Saint-Simonianism is a doctrine also based upon transfer, and this is why, on this point, the Saint-Simonians remain deeply opposed to Say and reject his views on the productive agency of natural agents (Say [1819] 2006: 1159).

This rejection is essential and conditions the entirety of the Saint-Simonian economic doctrine: idle landowners and capitalists can't be ranked at the same level as workers as (a) they do not produce anything and therefore (b) they are remunerated by interest. The Saint-Simonian goal is thus to end the exploitation of man by man. For instance, in an article devoted to competition between firms, the Saint-Simonian Enfantin distinguished competition among men (which decreases wages) from competition among things (which decreases prices), and argued that only the latter benefits workers and industry as a whole, as it contributes to improving commodities and increases consumption (Enfantin 1826f). In this, like Sismondi (1827), they both argue against "unbridled" competition. The Saint-Simonians reject competition among men but argue in favor of the competition of things: indeed, only the most able workers would be able to access a large amount of means of production "according to abilities". Only the application of ability on raw material creates value, and in order to be efficient only the most able should have access to more raw materials. From the Saint-Simonian theory of labour value there follow two theses regarding idleness.

The first thesis concerns those who do not apply their abilities. Property owners *only* gain remuneration (rent and profit); they do not *work*. The same holds true for capitalists who *only* rent the means of production to workers (this at a time at which the majority of workers were in the fields, even though workshops were beginning to flourish). In these two cases, renters and capitalists are idlers, as they are remunerated for tasks they have not performed.[16]

Second thesis: working also implies knowing how to express one's abilities. Another form of idleness is excessive consumption or hoarding, as it prevents capital serving in the economic system. In this respect, the capitalist—the holder of capital—can be seen as a worker only if his capital is invested into the economic circuit. Capitalists can express a kind of entrepreneurial ability by affording capital to the appropriate channels of production. This takes place in a special kind of company mentioned above—*la Commandite*—where in exchange for their contribution they are entitled to a share in accordance with the outcome. This kind of company ensures certain mobility for the means of production, and consequently it contributes to social utility, namely production. Here again we see the crucial idea of Saint-Simonianism: mobility. This explains why the core of the Saint-Simonian doctrine is access to the means of production.

The Saint-Simonian concept of the wage embodies not only workers' remuneration but also that of non-idler capitalists. By their refusal to put owners, capitalists, and workers on the same level, the Saint-Simonians break with the economists of their time. The Saint-Simonian wage thus becomes the remuneration from industry, i.e. the combination of individual skills, knowledge, and financial resources. Work becomes a criterion that distinguishes workers from idlers. At this stage of their reasoning, Ricardo is no longer a point of reference.

This is explained by an ineludible fact: neither Ricardo nor Say attach importance to historical phenomena, and neither notices the historical changes concerning industrialists and idle owners. More precisely, what the Saint-Simonians called the social influence of the industrialist has manifested constant increase, while that of the idle owner has gradually declined. Indeed, Enfantin (1826d) showed how "the spirit of association is substituted in

[16] As noted before by Jacoud (2014) this does not automatically mean that idlers are unskilled, but rather they don't use their skills at all even though they are able to contribute.

social links to the spirit of conquest".[17] Political economy from Say and Ricardo has then been unable to understand industrial change. This is related to the use of a specific method that is allied not only to history but also to social science. Hence political economy is the study of economic facts embodied in a science of society wherein the method is historical. One may easily perceive the contrast with economists like Ricardo and Say and their abstracted and psychological methodologies (although they do adopt different approaches). From the unhistorical approach of the latter economists emerge their major mistake, which is their confusion about socio-economic groups. On this point, the example of the Ricardian rent is typical of this error:

> As we cultivate less productive land every day, it may result from Ricardo's principle that land rents are expected to rise continuously, that is to say, the idle owners would collect a share of the overall production, even greater as production would be more difficult, this is what does not happen: on the contrary we believe that the profession of idlers, of inactive owners, becomes worse, and the land, like capital, is rented each day at a better rate for those who make the effort to cultivate, to work on it. Finally, we think that profits decrease and wages rise but we understand in the word 'wage' the benefit from industrialist entrepreneurs as we consider this benefit as the price of work. (Enfantin 1825b: 245)

Two points appear here: the labour theory of the Saint-Simonians (i) enables them to distinguish idlers and owners, and it also enables us (ii) to understand their admiration for Turgot, which is rooted in his concept of the 'disposable' class (Saint-Simonian Collective 1830: 121). Against the distinction proposed by Quesnay (sterile, productive, owner) and Smith (workers, capitalists, and property owners), the Saint-Simonians prefer Turgot's emphasis on the necessity to contribute to the general needs of society. Yet Turgot ([1776] 1795) makes a distinction between owner, farmer, and labourer. Cultivators (productive class) first produce more than their regular needs and provide work to the artificers (stipendiary class). The surplus created makes the need for work disappear, and so some cultivators become mere owners. Interestingly, it is the lack of ability of some owners—"the difference of knowledge" ([1776] 1795: 14)—that leads to a transfer of their lands to the most able of

[17] Here Enfantin refers to Constant ([1819] 2010) since Enfantin replaces Constant's distinction between ancient times (conquest) and modern times (peace) by a new opposition between conquest and association.

them. A new distinction between three branches then follows: cultivators, artificers, and proprietors: namely, the productive, stipendiary, and disposable classes. The third, the land-owning class, may be employed in the general service of society. In other words, Turgot felt the necessity of social contribution. This clearly explains the Saint-Simonians' preference toward Turgot over Smith or Ricardo. The question that now arises is how this social contribution can be defined.

3.2. ... toward a reinterpretation of utilitarian theories

The Saint-Simonian theory of labour is linked with a specific view on the ethical criterion of utility, which emerges from the strong links between J. S. Mill and the Saint-Simonians. As evidenced in Mill's *Autobiography* ([1873] 2009), there were indeed links between Utilitarianism and Saint-Simonianism. Mill expressed his admiration for the Saint-Simonians:

> The writers by whom, more than by any others, a new mode of political thinking was brought home to me, were those of the St. Simonian school in France. In 1829 and 1830 I became acquainted with some of their writings. They were then only in the earlier stages of their speculations. They had not yet dressed out their philosophy as a religion, nor had they organized their scheme of Socialism. They were just beginning to question the principle of hereditary property. I was by no means prepared to go with them even this length; but I was greatly struck with the connected view which they for the first time presented to me, of the natural order of human progress; and especially with their division of all history into organic periods and critical periods. During the organic periods (they said) mankind accept with firm conviction some positive creed, claiming jurisdiction over all their actions, and containing more or less of truth and adaptation to the needs of humanity. (Mill [1873] 2009: 107)

Mill, as well as Bentham, was deeply aware of what was happening in France, since several Saint-Simonians visited and wrote to them. Mill, for instance, was a close friend of the Saint-Simonian Eugène D'Eichthal. Mill also wrote to Comte several times (Griffiths 1997). Clearly, then, Mill had strong links with the Saint-Simonians, as well with the intellectual

influence of France more generally (Claeys 1987).[18] The 1848 revolution, for instance, played a great role in Mill's thought (Levin 2003). Bentham also at times appeared somewhat close to the Saint-Simonians (Bellet 2009, Sigot 2016). Nevertheless, apart from Halévy (1901), there are rather sparse references to the Saint-Simonians in the otherwise extensive literature on utilitarianism (see for instance, Rawls 2007).

The links between these authors and the Saint-Simonians, in addition to the focus by the latter on utility, is deserving of attention. In their quest to find a new ethical criterion which can undergird their social system, they share Bentham's views about utility. The goal of legislation is utility. Here is the Saint-Simonian opinion on Bentham and utility:

> The work of the great English jurist who attempted to bring all laws under the head of one principle will certainly be brought to our attention. We are too great admirers of Bentham to pass over his work in silence. He realized that it was only through their utility that institutions could be legitimized, and this realization was a great step, but it was not great enough. He merely put the difficulty off, because what is meant by social utility must still be explained. And indeed it will be realized, as we have already said, that slavery was useful even for the slave, when one considers that it replaced the barbarous destruction of the vanquished, even cannibalism. Must slavery therefore be re-established? (*DSS*: 132–33)

According to the Saint-Simonians, only production enables each individual to obtain subsistence. Hence, even though value is based upon work, utility emerges as a decisive criterion. The Saint-Simonians are not utilitarians, although they concur in some respects with Mill and Bentham on utility as an ethical criterion. However, utility is an unclear criterion, and they sought to clarify it (see the 8th session in *DSS*). Inequalities would end if utility were substituted by production as an ethical criterion: if the aim was to produce utility then the major criterion would be not utility but production itself. Everyone should be able to access the means of production, but also to help build a system that promotes utility, namely production:

[18] Claeys, G. 1987. Justice, independence, and industrial democracy: the development of John Stuart Mill's view on socialism. *The journal of politics* 49(1): 122–147.

> The goal of the social organisation […] is production; we should add then (as it is a necessary consequence) that production should be the primary goal and results of laws. This proposal, *utility is the goal of legislation*, led to this question. *What is utility?* And, if we want to be in good faith, it has to be agreed that solution was quite embarrassing: as it is currently found, we can answer by a word which sense could be understood by all intelligences: 'this is production'. (Duvergier 1825: 208)

The fact that utility according to the Saint-Simonian doctrine means production deserves development. Here the Saint-Simonians seem to borrow the Benthamian concept of social utility; however, they use it only at a collective level. There is no conception of individual utility within the Saint-Simonian framework: the Saint-Simonian social goal being alignment of all minds toward the same interest (mostly during organic periods), it seems to refer to a kind of collective decision rule that recalls Benthamite social utility. Moreover, Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonians deal with what they call "positive utility": "the general interests of society, both in physical and moral terms, must be directed by men whose abilities are of the most general and positive use" (Saint-Simon 2012 [1823–24]: 2977)[19]. This is the basis for their idea that everyone has to contribute. However, the individual contribution has to fulfil the social collective goal. Such a goal constantly changes in accordance with the progress of human minds. Their emphasis on history explains why they criticize the lack of philosophy of history in Bentham's thought (*DSS*: 132–33)..

The Saint-Simonians proposed an original analysis of capital: this did not concern a linkage under a common name of the *instrumens de production* or land, but rather the adoption of a dynamic analysis which combines capital and labor: capital is "past work" (Enfantin 1826d: 68). Capital is the work that has already been provided, and the Saint-Simonian vision is justified by the fact that only work already provided—human production—confers a right to remuneration. The Saint-Simonian focus on this temporal notion reflects the fact that in their historical analysis, idleness only consumes production, and lives off the fruits of the work of others, namely the interest gained from soil or *instrumens*.

[19] Les intérêts généraux de la société, tant sous les rapports physiques que sous les rapports moraux, doivent être dirigés par les hommes dont les capacités sont de l'utilité la plus générale et la plus positive.

As shown above, Saint-Simonianism never deals with a strict contestation of the composition of property rights, and distinguishes two social groups: idlers against the working class (or the working classes, depending on context) which comprises about "99/100 of the human species" (Rouen 1826c).[20] We may note that the term 'class' is sometimes used in their work, yet they propose no industrialist class theory; unlike Saint-Simon (James 1973, Piguet 1996, 2002). The inability to freely access the means of production is seen by the Saint-Simonians as an economic injustice. Here we see the appearance of a theme already developed by Sismondi, which would inspire the Saint-Simonians as well as Marx (Berlin [1939] 1948).

The Saint-Simonian emphasis on productivity sheds light on their propensity to believe in the material conditions of social improvement. Crucially, economics grounds the whole system of industry and contributes to its improvement. In that sense, economic efficiency provides the key to social improvement. In this, the political economy of the Saint-Simonians is deeply social. This explains why, against the science of production, consumption, and distribution derived from Say, the Saint-Simonians follow Saint-Simon and his emphasis on distribution.

Seen in this light, the concept of utility here has nothing to do with Benthamite utilitarianism. Production, as a useful process, has to be linked with the distribution of final goods, and prior to this with the means of production. This also opens the way to a whole stream of thought based upon this distribution of the means of production, even though it rejects the Saint-Simonian reference to work. Thus the social thinkers (Blanc, Pecqueur, Proudhon, Walras) follow the Saint-Simonian slogan with its emphasis on the useful aspect of production, and above all on the necessity for the organization of production. Nevertheless many of them follow Blanc's focus on "needs" rather than the Saint-Simonian criterion of "works": "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

The focus on utility—interpreted as meaning "being useful"—also enables us to understand the definition of the Saint-Simonian idler: the idler is one who does not know where the means of production must be afforded. This explains why the Saint-Simonians were strongly determined to pursue Bentham's work, going one step further by replacing utility with

[20] Interestingly enough, the notion of the 99% finds an interesting echo after the financial crisis of 2008, where the phrase "We are the 99%" became a slogan used by Occupy, a protest movement that began in 2011 and which aimed to reduce social and economic inequalities. Specifically, this movement argued against the anti-austerity reforms engaged by several governments after the crisis.

production. It is not a coincidence that former Saint-Simonians Leroux and Reynaud, in their *Encyclopédie Nouvelle*, use the terms "école de la production" as well as "les *utilitaires – producteurs*" in speaking about the Saint-Simonians (Leroux and Reynaud [1836] 1840: 594).[21]

Smith had already seen that the worker, through the division of labor, "generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become" (*WN* V.i.f.50) and that "in every commercial nation the low people are exceedingly stupid" ([1762–3, 1766] 1982: 539). However, the Saint-Simonians had a rather positive image of the division of tasks, and rejected Smith's argument. Although Rouen did not strictly deny such an evil, he remained deeply convinced that education—and morality—would soon improve the workers' fate (Rouen 1826b). The improvement of ability then occupies a key position in the Saint-Simonian doctrine. Such a view can only be understood within their historical framework. Hence, where Say argued against the errors of a few entrepreneurs and their lack of industry (see his article in *La Revue Encyclopédique* 1824), the Saint-Simonians developed this argument by an emphasis on structural and historical issues: during each historical stage of society there are individuals with special abilities who are helpful and enable progress. As we shall show below, this is directly borrowed from Condorcet's *Sketch for a historical picture of the progress of the human mind* (1794).[22]

Finally, the present point is that the production-based economy requires individuals to contribute to what the Saint-Simonians call "social utility," thanks to their skills and knowledge. Seen in this light, the recurring commercial crises (1811–15, 1825) are a symptom of a lack of organization of production, but also a symptom of a lack of competence from un-able capitalists. The fact that a privileged minority owns capital and soil and consumes instead of producing is explained by their lack of skills; the solution, therefore, is the redistribution of the means of production. Above all is it necessary to gradually enable each individual to acquire not only the necessary tools but also the skills to use them. Without

[21] Pierre Leroux and Jean Reynaud abandoned Saint-Simonianism in November 1831. They also wrote: "Saint-Simon faisait évidemment un pas en avant sur Bentham. Il donnait l'explication du principe de ce dernier ; il substituait une idée nette et précise, la *production*, à une idée tout à fait obscure, l'*utilité* ; il apportait pour ainsi dire le mot de l'énigme. Les disciples un peu forts de Bentham en France devinrent donc les disciples de Saint-Simon. Il n'y eut pas en France d'*utilitaires*, il y eut des *producteurs*" (Leroux and Reynaud [1836] 1840: 594).

[22] Turgot also influenced the Saint-Simonians (see Enfantin 1826j).

this, production loses its utility and therefore its value, and becomes mere non-reproductive consumption. This is symbolized by the first part of their maxim: “to each according to his ability”. It follows that skills and knowledge should be freely used in the production process.

The more skills and knowledge are involved in this process, the more it will be likely to improve social conditions. Everyone should be entitled to access the instruments of production, regardless of age, sex, social status, etc. Here Saint-Simonianism inaugurates a modern idea: the equal consideration of each (equal worth). Furthermore, industry and political reform provide the opportunity to shape the social and economic environment (intentional design). On this basis, once this right of access is ensured, the allocation of *instrumens de production* would be based upon individual ability. Finally, then, here lies one of the first incursions into the field of theories of distributive justice in the modern sense of the term. These two aspects of social justice–equal worth and intentional designs–must be specified, however, because thus far we have said nothing about the underlying philosophical justifications.

4. Behind social change and justice: the historical progress of the human mind

The Saint-Simonian theory of labour value can be comprehended only within their wider emphasis on the historical progress of the human mind. Inspired by Condorcet (1794), the Saint-Simonians build up a philosophy of history based upon perfectibility and progress. Specifically, Saint-Simonianism sheds light on the historical alternation between social states whose major characteristic is the equilibrium between human institutions and consciousness. Although progress is a constant through history, various social states have sometimes been marked by institutional immobility, which prevents progress extending to its full measure. The Saint-Simonian reasoning about industrial production—the focus on mobility—makes sense with respect to this philosophy of history: just as the means of production must circulate unimpeded throughout the various channels of production, human institutions must remain mobile and must change in order to track the progress of consciousness.

The Saint-Simonians shed light on several historical phases of constant progress had alternated. These phases are based upon the match between human institutions and human

consciousness, where this match is at the root of each social state. It is not unusual at this time to find historical theories of social states (Grotius, Pufendorf, Smith, Condorcet, Turgot, Dunoyer etc.), whose purpose is to explain the evolution of livelihoods including the appearance of ownership and the composition of property. The Saint-Simonians are no exception to the rule: specifically, they are close to what Schumpeter called the "intellectualist evolutionism" of Condorcet and Auguste Comte ([1954] 2006). Hence Comte was a Saint-Simonian, being best remembered for his Three Stages theory, even though Saint-Simon himself also claimed paternity of that proposal. Indeed, they both claim to have shaped this law, which they wrote together (1822). Notwithstanding this debate, the Saint-Simonians were convinced that a positive state would be reached once their principles had been applied. Hence each field of knowledge, each science, has three stages: theological, metaphysical, and finally the positive state.

Setting out their doctrine in the *Exposition* (1830), the Saint-Simonians quote Ballanche, Condorcet, Herder, Kant, Lessing, Turgot, and Vico although they argue that the idea of perfectibility remained sterile in their hands. According to Saint-Simon, however, Condorcet had made an effort to shape a system based upon the idea of perfectibility and had developed Locke's views on unlimited perfectibility (1808). It is in this sense that Condorcet inspired the Saint-Simonians, mostly regarding their aim to base their philosophy of history upon perfectibility. Condorcet explains how reason gains currency through ten epochs. The sentimentalism and radicalism emanating from England (mostly from Ferguson), and the Hegelian philosophy were influential in France (Berlin [1939] 1948). Indeed, French thought remains eclectic (not only regarding the Eclectic school, but also by its propensity to deal with both sentiment and reason). In this respect Saint-Simonianism was no exception. Hence, based upon the law of perfectibility, which can be read as the ascension of reason over Nature, it is worth recalling that it is sentiment which enables reason to emerge. Even the most reasonable social system still has to be accepted by its members: this explains the growing Saint-Simonian emphasis on religion as a social link (Macherey 1992). And it also explains why they were so deeply convinced that all social change takes time, and that crises like the French Revolution could only destroy, rather than rebuild a new system.

The Saint-Simonians make clear use of the idea of perfectibility on one crucial point: within the framework of the social division of tasks, the play of these abilities reaches its climax: economic progress is nothing but the result of the exercise of human abilities. This explains

the Saint-Simonians' theory of labor value, but above all their positive—if not euphoric—vision of the future. Interestingly, the Saint-Simonians were not the only ones to be inspired by Condorcet: industrialist and liberal authors as Charles Comte—and especially Dunoyer—also followed this tradition of analysis and adopt the idea of perfectibility (Hart 1994). Seeking the system most appropriate to human nature and most favourable to the development of all faculties, Dunoyer (1825) appears close to the Saint-Simonian project. However, the liberal industrialists rejected the Saint-Simonian analysis on two major points. First, they refused to interfere in the natural convergence of interests. In other words, the liberal industrialist approach allows some reforms to correct for social dysfunctions (especially concerning education) but refuses to propose a new economic system. The second point concerns the religious aspect of Saint-Simonianism, which cannot be brought into alignment with the utilitarian views of the liberal industrialists (Steiner 2006b). In this respect there is no liberal industrialist theory of social justice.

Thus this idea of perfectibility plays a key role in the assertion concerning human control over nature and the environment. The environment, so considered, is not only natural but also social and economic. Above all, the environment is characterised by the equilibrium between institutions and consciousness. Here the Saint-Simonians distinguish several periods of history; and the Saint-Simonian doctrine is based upon the idea of alternation. In a *critical* period, the given social state is merely the sum of individuals pursuing their own interests: no harmony or unity can emerge. On the contrary, in an *organic* period, individuals succeed in living together despite their differences. It follows that the French Revolution and associated commercial crises are only symptoms of a deeper problem characteristic of a critical phase.

This is upon this basis that the Saint-Simonians proposed a positive analysis that shed light on the links between social conditions and progress in the general sense. This allows the Saint-Simonians to theorize a golden age poised to emerge (Mathews 1964). This social state is to be obtained as soon as a new organic phase emerges. Every human institution has had its usefulness, but had to make way for a new one once it has shown its limits. Again, only mobility counts. A significant example could be slavery, an institution that could claim usefulness in the past. Hence the Saint-Simonians here share Constant's views (1819): slavery did indeed free up time for political participation in Ancient Greek society.[23]

[23] On the links between Constant and Saint-Simonianism, see Bourdeau and Fink (2008).

This alternation through history has always manifested in an antagonism between those who had access to wealth—and justified this by their social utility—and those who possessed less. During industrialization, idlers failed to contribute to the social utility as they kept means of production outside the production system. Another example can be drawn from the Roman Empire: the fact that a minority of nobles kept the wealth generated by war was justified insofar as it provided for protection against invaders. Progressively, however, this equilibrium becomes unjustified and eventually another social state needs replace the former. When wealth is not justified by social utility, antagonisms appear and these come to constitute the main feature of critical periods. As shown above, organic periods give rise to social structures that perfectly reflect the harmony of individual interests. Once the hierarchy and social order are established, this harmony will once again emerge and, above all, endure.

All this leads these authors to believe in the ability of industrial society to generate a more promising future. We may note that a writer like Rousseau had always considered that moral corruption was associated with the evolution of the arts and sciences. Yet the Saint-Simonians join Rousseau on the question of the composition of property, as evident in the famous passage: "laws are always of use to those who possess and harmful to those who have nothing: from which it follows that the social state is advantageous to men only when all have something and none too much" (chapter 9, note 1 of *Social Contract*). Where the Saint-Simonians criticise Rousseau—and also Sismondi—is not on their negative view of future but as regards their lack of political proposals: according to the Saint-Simonians, in all Rousseau's work there is not one phrase pointing to a recognition of a means for distributing the land that is common to all in a manner that is useful to society. According to the Saint-Simonians, Rousseau should not have condemned property without then seeking some means to perfect it (see the 7th session in Saint-Simonian Collective 1830); but no such critique can be levelled at the Saint-Simonians. Therefore on the links between Rousseau and the Saint-Simonians, the point to retain is their common criticism of the composition of ownership.

To reach the new organic phase—the final Saint-Simonian stage—some institutions must disappear. Thus Saint-Simonianism is a doctrine which state that institutions are relative: through progress and the mechanism of scientific advances, the evolution of society towards a production-based economy raises the prospect that everyone can and should be able to produce. The means of production are not available for all, as a human institution prevents it.

Here stands again the essential equilibrium between institutions and human consciousness for social progress and the social improvement of workers. This equilibrium is ensured by mobility. It follows that institutions must change and follow the evolution of consciousness.

The crucial point is that the new industrial society requires new institutions that are better able to oppose the operations of chance—the chaotic competition of interests, economic mistakes, and the privileges of birth. This is what justifies their attacks on the composition of property, the most advanced form of privilege: hence, in every social transformation, in every political revolution, the right of property has undergone more or less profound changes. For instance, under the system of slavery, men themselves formed the largest portion of property: and slavery was destroyed. By a historical process—the institution of property—the production-based economy has introduced new forms of activity that link workers to the owners of the means of production. But this process has lost its legitimacy: owners are no longer useful because of their idleness and their unjustified acquisition of wealth. The workers should have access to the means of production, something which is rendered impossible insofar as the institution of property fails to follow the movement of consciousness. Progressively, production plays a predominant role in social life (trade, division of labor, technological progress) while the institutions that are supposed to follow remain unmovable. Indeed, according to the Saint-Simonians, other kinds of institutions must be developed: for instance, banks must develop *escompte* (discounts), a simple way to increase the mobility of means of production, while projects of *commandite* are widely discussed in their journals.

Finally, "human society [...] must not consist of two classes, one of idle oppressors and the other of oppressed workers; men should form a general association, in which everyone is called to act as determined by the extent of his ability, by the importance and utility of his work" (Duveyrier 1826: 488). In addition, "society consists of two distinct classes [...] the first, the most numerous lives by his own work, the second rests and lives off the work of the first" (Enfantin 1826e: 219). Saint-Simonianism is a doctrine concerned with a transfer: the transfer of the means of production from one social group to another. What is at stake is the transfer of the means of production from idle and un-able hands into the able hands of workers. This idea of mobility is situated within the wider production system; but that system does not only concern industrial infrastructure, since the banking system too will play a major role in the transfer of the means of production. The system of credit – in the sense of *credere* – then comes to play an important role in the re-composition of property.

5. Conclusion

The Saint-Simonians maintained that due to the progress that had been made within the industrial economic system, the means of production could now be distributed to everyone. This development of the industrial system comprised the material condition for the emergence of the idea of social justice in a recognisably modern form. The intellectual condition for the emergence of that idea was fulfilled by the spirit of the French Revolution, and particularly the *Declaration* of 1789, which created an egalitarian atmosphere in which it seemed obvious that everyone should be able to improve their socio-economic status. Saint-Simonianism, then, not only forms part of the tradition of thinkers who "discovered a new peak from which to survey the terrain of justice" (Johnston 2011: 167), but indeed is the first doctrine to frame an entire system based upon the idea of ability. Faced with the emergence of growing inequalities within a context of rapid economic development, the Saint-Simonians proposed a way to develop a social state within each individual would be entitled to access the means of production.

Thus Saint-Simonianism is not a mere pre-Marxian socialism unable to "be taken quite seriously" (Schumpeter [1954] 2006: 430). As a French industrialist doctrine developed in response to a paradox, Saint-Simonianism stands at the heart of the emergence of the modern form of distributive justice: the idea of social justice. The Saint-Simonians develop a theory of economic justice based upon ability; this notion remains a major current throughout 19th century, and clearly contributed to the emergence of another famous slogan coined by Louis Blanc: "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs".

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