



## Disciplinary Practice and the Practice of Discipline, or Political Economy and Paternalism in Nineteenth- Century France

Elizabeth Sage

In this paper, I examine the network between nineteenth-century French industrialists practicing paternalist discipline and nineteenth-century French political economists engaged in institutionalizing their own academic discipline. I also examine the relationship between (industrial) discipline during the nineteenth century (how industrialists responded to the labor problems facing them and how the managerial practices they erected “disciplined” workers) and the (academic) discipline of political economy, which purported to study the practices and achievements of industrial discipline. I explore the connection between political economists’ obsession with their own discipline and French industrialists’ use of a particular form of industrial paternalist “discipline,” and how and why French industrialists came to be embroiled in political economists’ efforts at disciplinary formation and boundary protection.

In 1878, a life-sized statue commissioned by the Établissements Schneider, France’s preeminent iron and steel firm, was erected in the main plaza in the French town of Le Creusot. This statue, symbolizing and commemorating the paternalism of the Schneider family on behalf of the residents of Le Creusot, consisted of three figures: standing on a pedestal was Eugène Schneider, the company’s *grand patron* from 1837 to 1874, while seated at the foot of the pedestal were a woman and a small boy. The woman and boy were wearing work clothes and *sabots*, immediately identifying them as members of the working class. The woman was looking at the little boy while pointing to Schneider, as if telling him about the *patron*. Although the statue has now been moved into a corner of the plaza to make way for the town’s largest parking lot, it still suggests the way French industrialists tried to represent their paternalism to themselves, their workers, and the public. The *patron* was both husband and father, taking care of those less fortunate and less capable of caring for

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**Elizabeth Sage** is at the Department of History, Whittier College.

themselves, represented in this statue by a woman and child, standing in for workers at large.<sup>1</sup>

My focus in this article is the relationship between this mode of discipline (the paternalist labor strategies of nineteenth-century French industrialists like the Schneiders) and another type of discipline, the academic discipline of nineteenth-century French political economy. My use of the term discipline is multi-faceted; discipline is a type of power, the techniques employed to exercise that power, and a body of knowledge with particular assumptions, methods, and structures that exercise control over what can be said and thought. “Disciplines” are bodies of knowledge that have, in fact, been “disciplined”: constrained, limited, bordered, and enclosed. This “disciplinary” process, however, is just that: a process. No discipline emerges free-floating; instead, disciplines are created, altered, and protected: over time, under constraint, and as the result of practical historical circumstances.

In this paper, I offer a very brief case study of disciplinary formation and boundary protection, and of the historical circumstances in which one discipline, French political economy, struggled to protect itself from unwanted and unexpected knowledge revealed by French industrialists and their paternalist discipline. I examine the network between French industrialists’ use of paternalist discipline and the “disciplining,” or the rethinking and defending, of the discipline of political economy by nineteenth-century economists. What was the connection between French industrialists’ use of paternalist discipline and political economists’ obsession with the processes of disciplinary formation and boundary protection? What did the practices and assumptions of paternalist discipline mean for economists as economic experts, social observers, and social critics? In addition, what did it mean for them as practitioners of a discipline still very much in the process of formation and legitimation?

### **The Problem of Paternalist Discipline**

In the 1820s and 1830s France began to experience the social consequences of nineteenth-century industrialization, consequences that contemporaries and historians alike have labeled *la question sociale* (the social question).<sup>2</sup> Among the first publicists of *la question sociale* were

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Reid also refers to this statue in his article “Industrial Paternalism: Discourse and Practice in Nineteenth-Century French Mining and Metallurgy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27 (1985): 581.

<sup>2</sup> The following is a mere sample of the wide variety of historical scholarship that has contributed to the topic of *la question sociale*: Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, 1978); William Coleman, *Death is a Social Disease: Public Health and Political Economy in Early Industrial France* (Madison, 1982); Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York, 1979); François

French industrialists who noted problems among their workers ranging from the most obvious material problems of wages, working conditions, and lack of discipline, to political problems (for instance, the spread of socialist ideas among workers), to private questions of individual morality. Most simply, *la question sociale* encompassed all the unexpected effects of, and responses to, industrial capitalism. It brought recognition of industrialization's brutal social consequences, the worst of which needed mitigation.<sup>3</sup>

However, scholars have also pointed to the wider social and political implications of what often appeared to be straightforward analyses of child labor, abandoned families, unemployed workers, and working mothers. *La question sociale* was a phenomenon not simply of French industrial development in the early nineteenth century; it was also the phenomenon of the political turmoil inherited from the French Revolution, and of the difficult process of remaking both society and citizens within that new society. *La question sociale*, then, had political as well as economic causes and implications. It was, as sociologist Giovanna Procacci has noted, both a discursive and a practical space, a space not only for the discussion of how building homes for workers would promote proper moral behavior, but also of the meaning of misery for French society, and how miserable and visibly unequal citizens could be invited into a society founded upon fraternity and equality.<sup>4</sup> *La question sociale*, or the problem of misery and all its causes and consequences, was thus a threat not only to workers suffering from unemployment, malnutrition, and ill health, but also to the development of a new type of society.<sup>5</sup>

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Ewald, *L'État providence* (Paris, 1986); Katherine A. Lynch, *Family, Class, and Ideology in Early Industrial France* (Madison, 1988); Giovanna Procacci, *Gouverner la Misère: la Question Sociale en France, 1789-1848* (Paris, 1993); Joan Scott, "L'ouvrière! Mot impie, sordide...": Women Workers in the Discourse of French Political Economy, 1840-1860," *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1999); William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France* (Cambridge, U.K., 1980).

<sup>3</sup> As historian Janet Horne has written, "This human side of the ferment caused by economic growth constituted the social question." Janet R. Horne, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France: The Musée Social and the Rise of the Welfare State* (Durham, N.C., 2002), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Procacci, *Gouverner la Misère*, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Horne also draws attention to the broader significance of *la question sociale*: "Debate on the social question also raised awareness of related anxieties: the new contours of civil society, the role and limits of the state, the identity and responsibility of elites in an industrializing economy, the changing nature of poverty, the shifting functions of secular and religious institutions, the definition of the public sphere, and the perceived lacunae in liberal political economy as a blueprint for modern social relations." See Horne, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France*, 24.

If some French industrialists tried to ignore *la question sociale*, others adopted the strategy of paternalism, with the goal of directing, correcting, and regulating the working class in its private domestic life as well as its productive work life. Paternalist discipline was an effort to repress workers' supposedly dangerous or unproductive practices or behaviors, and to solve unexpected social problems accompanying industrialization. To emphasize only its repressive goal, however, misses what is novel and interesting about the paternalist strategy. Paternalism was also a creative system of power, implemented in order to produce docile, mute, productive, stable, and moral bodies.<sup>6</sup>

As both a creative and repressive disciplinary strategy, paternalism developed in what one economic historian refers to as the *France du développement*—the France that lay east of an imaginary line running from Cherbourg in the northwest to Marseille in the southeast.<sup>7</sup> And nowhere in this “developed” France were the new circumstances of industrial society, and thus *la question sociale*, experienced with as much immediacy as in towns like Le Creusot—known during the nineteenth century for its manufacture of steel rails, railroad cars, steam engines, and steel beams—and Mulhouse—one of France's most successful textile towns until its annexation to Germany in 1871.<sup>8</sup> In the early nineteenth century, these towns were among the first to begin to mechanize, organize large bodies of workers, struggle with control of the production process, and implement paternalism as a solution to the social effects of industrial development. The reputations of Mulhouse and Le Creusot as model paternalist factory towns were established early in the nineteenth century, and it was because prestigious firms like these practiced it that

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<sup>6</sup> For my discussion of what Michel Foucault referred to as “disciplinary technology,” I have relied upon John S. Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline: The Politics of Subjectivity* (Durham, N.C., 1997); Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1983); Jan Goldstein, “Foucault among the Sociologists: The ‘Disciplines’ and the History of the Professions,” *History and Theory* 23, no. 2 (1984): 170-92; and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Alain Dewerpe, *Le monde du travail en France, 1800-1950* (Paris, 1989), 79.

<sup>8</sup> For the history of Le Creusot see Christian Devillers and Bernard Huet, *Le Creusot: naissance et développement d'une ville industrielle, 1782-1914* (Seysssel, 1981); Émile Cheysson, *Le Creusot: condition moral, matérielle et intellectuelle de la population* (Paris, 1869); and Marcel Sutet and Jean-Pierre Brésillon, *Du terroir à l'usine: Le Creusot, Montceau-les-Mines autrefois* (Le Coteau, 1983). For the history of the city of Mulhouse, see Georges Livet and Raymond Oberlé, *Histoire de Mulhouse des origines à nos jours* (Strasbourg, 1977); and Marie-Madeleine Kahan-Rabecq, *L'Alsace économique et sociale sous le règne de Louis-Philippe* (Paris, 1939).

paternalism had captured, by the mid-nineteenth century, the attention of a wide public and inspired public discussion.<sup>9</sup>

Descriptions of paternalism are plentiful in the historical literature. Suffice to say here that in paternalist factory towns like Le Creusot and Mulhouse, industrial paternalism took the form of efforts to build housing for workers,<sup>10</sup> to offer educational opportunities,<sup>11</sup> to organize health services,<sup>12</sup> to administer a variety of pension plans, insurance programs, and savings accounts,<sup>13</sup> and to organize leisure-time activities.<sup>14</sup> For

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<sup>9</sup> Evidence of this interest in paternalism is provided by the number of inquiries received by the Industrial Society of Mulhouse concerning the *cités ouvrières*, or workers' cities, built by Mulhousian textile manufacturers. By 1865, the Society had received so many requests for information that it decided to print and send brochures in response to these requests. See the *Bulletin de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* 35 (Jan. 1865). The Schneiders of Le Creusot, although less prolific than some of their contemporaries, published two large books, complete with tables, graphs, and photographs, describing the paternalist institutions and services offered by the firm to its employees. See *Les Établissements Schneider: Économie Sociale* (Paris, 1912) and *Économie Sociale: Institutions de MM. Schneider et C<sup>ie</sup>* (Nevers, 1905).

<sup>10</sup> The basic history of the workers' housing projects in Mulhouse can be found in Achille Penot's article "Project d'habitations pour les classes ouvrières," *Bulletin de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* 24 (June 1852); also see Stephan Jonas, Philippe Heckner and Jean-Michel Knorr, *La cité de Mulhouse (1853-1870): un modèle d'habitat économique et social du dix-neuvième siècle* (Strasbourg, 1981); and Nicholas Bullock and James Read, *The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France, 1840-1914* (Cambridge, U.K., 1985). Discussion of housing in Le Creusot can be found in *Économie sociale: institutions de MM. Schneider et Cie; Les Établissements Schneider: Économie sociale*; Devillers and Huet, *Le Creusot: Naissance et développement d'une ville industrielle*; and Jean-Pierre Frey, *La ville industrielle et ses urbanités: la distinction ouvrier-employé: Le Creusot, 1870-1930* (Bruxelles, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> For education in Le Creusot, see "Règlement de la caisse de secours et des écoles," 1 Jan. 1837, Académie François Bourdon [AFB] DH/0009; Félix Courtois, *Les écoles du Creusot, 1787-1882* (Autun, 1893); and Jean Forest, *L'emprise* (Paris, 1971). For Mulhouse, see *Rapport, fait au nom de la Commission chargée par l'assemblée générale des fabricants du canton de Mulhouse, de présenter un projet sur les moyens à employer pour faire jouir du bienfait de l'instruction primaire les enfants qui peuplent les filateurs et les fabriques*, 11 Jan. 1826, Archives municipales de Mulhouse [AMM], Mulhouse, R/I/Cb2.

<sup>12</sup> In Le Creusot, for example, the first company infirmary and pharmacy were built in 1837, as soon as the Schneider brothers took over the firm. Two hospitals were built, the first in 1879 and the second in 1894.

<sup>13</sup> For discussions of *caisses* in Mulhouse and Le Creusot, see Denise Herrenschildt, "Les caisses de secours entre ouvriers à Mulhouse de 1800 à 1870," *Bulletin du Musée historique de Mulhouse* 66 (1958): 69-113; and "Règlement de la caisse de secours et des écoles," 1 Jan. 1837, AFB DH/0009.

French industrialists grappling with *la question sociale*, industrial prosperity seemed to entail an involvement in workers' public and private lives with an eye to mitigating the human costs of industrialization while maintaining profits. If industrial factory labor appeared to render workers more miserable and thus less disciplined (in other words, less productive and more political), paternalism entailed strategies that appeared to render workers less miserable and thus more disciplined (more productive and less political).

At an 1866 meeting of the Industrial Society of Mulhouse, Frederick Engel-Dollfus, a well-known Alsatian industrialist, explained the rationale behind Mulhousian industrialists' adoption of paternalist projects:

The manufacturer owes something more to his workers than a salary; it is equally his obligation to concern himself with their moral and physical condition, and this obligation, which no type of salary can replace, must take precedence over considerations of private interest.<sup>15</sup>

Despite common and frequent expressions of humanitarianism, paternalist industrialists never hid the economic motives behind their paternalist projects. Helping workers was a step toward assuring industrial success, as the *Établissements Schneider* made quite explicit in a report given to the Chamber of Deputies:

In working for the well-being of the working class...one is not only satisfying an obligation toward humanity, one is also acting wisely in the interest of industry. It has been demonstrated that it is an important element of success for a factory to give its workers a salary which permits them to provide for all their needs, to develop their intelligence and their morality, and to win their confidence and their loyalty.... Without moralization, one cannot obtain a constant, regular and devoted labor force. Without education, one can neither form elite workers for different types of work, nor even ordinary laborers.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gardening was the earliest, and would remain the most important, form of leisure, but by the end of the nineteenth century, firms were also organizing a variety of sports programs, musical groups, and literary groups. For information on workers' gardens see Jean Dollfus and Louis Hugnenin to the Minister of the Interior, 15 Feb. 1854, Archives Départementales du Haut-Rhin [ADHR], Colmar, 9/M/24; Penot, *Les cités ouvrières de Mulhouse et du département du Haut-Rhin* (Mulhouse, 1867), 80-81; and "Projet de jardins ouvriers," 18 Sept. 1919, Écomusée du Creusot [EC], Le Creusot, A/271.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in the *Centenaire de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse, 1826-1926*, 2 vols. (Mulhouse, 1926), 1:97.

<sup>16</sup> "Notice sur la population ouvrière du Creusot," n.d., AFB DH/0010. This undated document appears to be a restatement of a report given by an unnamed member of the Schneider firm to the Chamber of Deputies. The document looks as if it had been cut out of a journal, perhaps the *Journal officiel*, and glued onto separate pages to form a small brochure.

The Établissements Schneider of Le Creusot congratulated itself in 1863 on the success of its efforts to create a steady and disciplined labor force. Not only was the present generation of workers educated, disciplined, and loyal, but the company's paternalist strategies had also produced a second generation of workers. The company's success was thus assured not only by the quality of its products, but by the quality and the dependability of its workers.<sup>17</sup> Even earlier, in 1829, Alsatian industrialist Jean Zuber warned:

Look around you. Do you see prosperity settling in the place where, from workers up to masters, everything radiates that spirit of isolation and suspicion which characterized the corporations of the last century...or instead, don't you see fortune turning toward the side where everything radiates a liberal and philanthropic spirit, where employers see it as a duty to give education and ease to their workers?<sup>18</sup>

The operative word in Zuber's warning was "fortune." There was nothing about paternalist programs, according to Mulhousian industrialists, that would harm a company's productivity or profitability. In fact, they asserted, well-fed, well-housed, and well-educated workers could only improve productivity and profitability, and the money spent by employers on paternalist institutions would almost surely come back to them in the form of a stable, reliable, and loyal workforce.

As industrialists explained their paternalism, they sometimes offered explicit critiques not only of a *laissez-faire* approach to their workers, but also of those political economists who advocated this approach. While industrialists balked at state intervention into the way they managed their workers, claiming that they could offer workers assistance more efficiently than the state and without the typical consequences of state-sponsored assistance, namely irresponsibility and dependence, they also balked at the suggestion that leaving their workers alone to fend for themselves was the best managerial strategy. As early as the 1830s, Alsatian industrialists criticized what they perceived to be political economists' unfamiliarity with economic reality. One industrialist argued that although the most logical theoretical solution during a commercial crisis would be to lay off all his workers and to shut down the factory until the economic outlook improved, common humanity prohibited employers from ignoring workers during periods of

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<sup>17</sup> "Rapport du gérant," 30 Nov. 1863, Archives Nationales [AN] 187/AQ/3. A few years later, Émile Cheysson also attributed the firm's industrial success to its ability to form a reliable labor force through education, wages, and housing. See Cheysson, *Le Creusot: condition moral, matérielle et intellectuelle de la population*.

<sup>18</sup> "Rapport annuel fait à l'assemblée générale par M. Jean Zuber, fils," *Bulletin de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* 2, Bulletin 8 (1829): 235-47.

catastrophe.<sup>19</sup> Industrialists understood, they claimed, the real physical misery that overproduction and economic crises caused among workers, and pointed out that if economists came down from their ivory towers they would realize that although overproduction might be a theoretical impossibility, it was a practical reality.<sup>20</sup> The author of an article in the *Bulletin de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* argued that:

...these economists are very calm in the presence of these facts, thinking that overproduction will correct itself by either ceasing or diminishing production for a period of time. They wait patiently for the surplus to be sold. From the inside of their offices this situation is clear and simple enough, but in the presence of reality itself, what evil, what suffering, until this equilibrium is reestablished.<sup>21</sup>

Even when industrialists offered no explicit critiques of *laissez-faire* economic principles, they recognized that industrial capitalism did not necessarily proceed in the neat manner described by political economic theory, and that industrialization had had some unforeseen and unfortunate consequences, not only for workers, but also for themselves. French departmental archives are filled with letters from industrialists to local officials complaining of economic crises, unemployed workers, and the threat of social violence looming above industrial towns.<sup>22</sup> Whether or not the industrialists of towns like Mulhouse or Le Creusot had anything to fear from their workers, it is nonetheless significant that industrialists in these towns clearly thought that they did. They knew that they were operating in the middle of a large working-class population, dramatically outnumbered. They knew, whether or not they always liked to admit it, that workers lived in less-than-perfect conditions, and were well aware of what a miserable and angry working class could do, having already experienced strikes, riots, uprisings, and demonstrations. Under these conditions, to rely on *laissez-faire* labor strategies that offered industrialists too little control over workers seemed a risky strategy. Paternalism, which offered a gentle way to discipline and regulate workers, appeared a more prudent and productive tactic.

Oddly enough, nineteenth-century French industrialists were grappling with a Foucauldian question (anachronistically, of course). How were they to discipline workers to want to be productive and obedient at

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<sup>19</sup> M. Hartmann-Leibach to the Juge de Paix of St.-Amarin, 23 June 1853, ADHR 10/M/9.

<sup>20</sup> "Rapport par Emile Béres sur les causes du malaise industriel et commercial de la France et moyens d'y remédier," *Bulletin de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* 6, Bulletin 26 (1833): 16.

<sup>21</sup> See the "Rapport de la commission chargée d'examiner les mémoires pour le prix traitant de l'industrialisme," *Bulletin de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* 12, Bulletin 59 (1839): 394.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, ADHR 10/M/7, which contains letter after letter describing the miseries caused by economic crises in Mulhouse.



work, and moral, thrifty, law-abiding, and temperate at home? The answer, I argue, was the system of paternalist discipline, a network of efforts to create disciplined bodies (physically-disciplined at work, thrifty, industrious, self-controlled), productive and efficient bodies, moral bodies (paternal/maternal toward children, monogamous, temperate), docile bodies (loyal to the firm, obedient of rules, unquestioning of the status quo), and politically acquiescent bodies, but also individuals capable of self-discipline, who understood themselves not as people who had been, and were being, disciplined, but as individuals who had chosen self-discipline.

### Political Economy and *la question sociale*

French industrialists, however, were not the only ones struggling with *la question sociale*, the problem of what to do with miserable, unhappy, undisciplined, and dangerous workers. By the mid-nineteenth century, French political economists had begun to pay close attention to industrialists' paternalist solutions to the social question. However, whereas *la question sociale* posed a problem of discipline for industry, it posed a problem for the emergent discipline of political economy. *La question sociale* and industrialists' adoption of paternalism suggested (if not proved) that, contrary to economists' scientific assumptions, the economy might not be self-regulating, capitalism did not benefit all social groups equally, and hard work, thrift, and self-discipline not enough to stave off destitution.

Political economy in nineteenth-century France traced its origins back to Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, and his "discovery" of the principle of *laissez-faire*. According to early nineteenth-century French economists who considered themselves Smith's followers and defenders, the economy was a natural and self-correcting phenomenon, operating according to universal, self-regulating, and balanced laws. Thus, the best approach to the economy and economic affairs was a *laissez-faire* ("hands-off") stance. But for political economists, *laissez-faire*, *laissez-passer* not only denoted an economy free of state regulation and protection, but a society composed of individuals with the right to decide their own economic affairs and to assume responsibility for their decisions. Early nineteenth-century political economists were troubled by constraints placed on individual behavior that stemmed from sources other than the individual. If individuals were inherently rational and capable of exercising responsibility for their actions, and the natural order was self-regulating, outside intervention was tyrannical, or would disrupt the natural regulatory mechanisms of the social order. Before 1830, economists not only condemned all forms of organized state assistance to workers, maintaining that it would only encourage workers' laziness, immorality, and improvidence the state would always protect them, but

also forms of what they labeled “private charity,” which could spoil workers, degrade them, and destroy their self-respect.<sup>23</sup>

Prior to 1830 economists attempted to forge legitimacy for their science, and publicize their scientific tenets for the good, they argued, of social harmony and economic well-being.<sup>24</sup> Early nineteenth-century political economists fully acknowledged, however, that theirs was not a popular science.<sup>25</sup> By 1830, economists’ sense of having been slighted (as the “dismal science”), not only by popular opinion but also by the state that controlled posts in higher education, was palpable. Political economists would welcome the liberally inclined July Monarchy in 1830 as assuring them the opportunity to achieve the legitimacy and status they so desperately desired.

Unfortunately, this more welcoming political and economic climate also coincided with the appearance and public discussion of *la question sociale*. Economists’ precise descriptions of factory towns in journals like the *Journal des économistes*, France’s premier economic journal during the nineteenth century, suggested that they knew exactly what was transpiring in places like Mulhouse and Le Creusot, and were well aware of the problems that manufacturers were encountering with their labor

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<sup>23</sup> The most prominent proponent of this argument was Charles Dunoyer. See Charles Dunoyer, “Des objections qu’on a soulevées dans ces derniers temps contre le régime de la concurrence,” *Journal des économistes* 1 (1842): 12-43. A good discussion of Dunoyer’s approach to working-class misery is provided by Edgar Allix in his article “La déformation de l’économie politique libérale après Jean-Baptiste Say: Charles Dunoyer,” *Revue de l’histoire des doctrines économiques et sociales* 4 (1911): 115-47.

<sup>24</sup> According to historians Michel Lutfalla and Lucette Le Van-Lemesle, the four pillars of nineteenth-century French political economy’s self-promotion were the Société d’Économie politique, the chair of political economy at the Collège de France, the chair of industrial economy at the Conservatoire des arts et métiers, and the *Journal des économistes*. See Michel Lutfalla, “Aux origines du libéralisme économique en France: le *Journal des économistes*, analyse du contenu de la première série, 1841-1853,” *Revue d’histoire économique et sociale* 4 (1972): 496-97; and Lucette Le Van-Lemesle, “La promotion de l’économie politique en France au dix-neuvième siècle jusqu’à son introduction dans les facultés, 1815-1881,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 27 (April-June 1980): 280.

<sup>25</sup> Political economy’s association with the Enlightenment tradition, liberal philosophy, and anti-clericalism had made it an object of suspicion under Napoleon and the Restoration monarchy, forcing economists to take precautions, both intellectual and practical. Intellectually, early nineteenth-century economists teaching their subject often felt compelled to portray their science as a mere technical science that had nothing to contribute to public or political issues. Practically, an economist as well-known as Jean-Baptiste Say, whose courses were often attended, not just by legitimate students, but by police spies, was forced to read all his lectures, avoiding all spontaneous lecturing, and refuse to answer students’ questions except when they arrived by personal letter.

force.<sup>26</sup> For political economists, however, *la question sociale* posed a particular dilemma. It suggested that the economy was not naturally harmonious and balanced, and that the working-class had not benefited from the spread of industrial capitalism. In short, *la question sociale* suggested that something was wrong with political economists' theories regarding labor. Some type of social intervention and assistance thus seemed increasingly necessary, and by the 1840s, many political economists had become advocates of paternalism as the best way to solve *la question sociale*, hold off state efforts to organize welfare for workers, and constrain industrialists' rights to manage their workers however they pleased.

The *Journal des économistes* was filled with admiring descriptions of industrial paternalism.<sup>27</sup> If workers could not improve their material and moral conditions without help, economists asserted, then who better than manufacturers to provide this assistance? In 1844, economist Théodore Fix wrote:

When a vice has laid deep roots in an entire social class, that vice cannot be eliminated without prodigious efforts, and this class itself, exhausted by this vice, will certainly not have the necessary energy to take the initiative for a change and a reform. It is necessary, therefore, that the impulse should come from elsewhere, from the superior classes, and especially from masters and entrepreneurs.<sup>28</sup>

What better way for manufacturers to help workers than to remember the social links that bound them to their workers, links that

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<sup>26</sup> Louis-René Villermé, for instance, received much of his information on Mulhouse from a survey he sent to the members of the Industrial Society. See the "Rapport...sur les question relatives à l'état moral et physique des ouvriers, addresses à la Société industrielle par M. le docteur Villermé," *Bulletin de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* 8, Bulletin 40 (1835): 477.

<sup>27</sup> *Journal des économistes* articles featuring discussions of paternalism include: Théodore Fix, "Observations sur l'état des classes ouvrières," 12, no. 48 (1845): 289-317; Eugène Buret, "De l'exercice de la charité dans les circonstances actuelles," 2 (1842): 317-35; P.A. de la Nourais, "Des caisses de prévoyance établies en Belgique en faveur des ouvriers mineurs," 3 (1842): 263-80; Hippolyte Dussard, "Chronique," 4 (1843): 347-52; Hippolyte Dussard, "Travail et Charité," 5 (1843): 129-51; Théodore Fix, "Situation des classes ouvrières," 10, no. 37 (1844): 7-41; F. de la Farelle, "De la nécessité de fonder en France l'enseignement de l'économie politique," 14, no. 53 (1846): 97-105; Rapet, "Des conditions du bien-être pour les classes laborieuses et de l'influence qu'il exerce sur la moralité," 27, no. 116 (Nov. 1850): 324-39; and Eugène Véron, "Mulhouse et ses institutions ouvrières" 2d ser., 44, no. 130 (Oct. 1864): 53-65.

<sup>28</sup> Fix, "Situation des classes ouvrières," 28.

transcended the impersonal wage contract and ought never to be forgotten?<sup>29</sup> As Henri Baudrillart succinctly wrote:

Lots of benevolence, not inefficient and cold, but active and reconcilable with authority, a responsibility which feels itself to be entrusted with souls—this is what we need to ask not just from several industrialists, but from all.<sup>30</sup>

Like industrialists, political economists emphasized the economic as well as the social benefits of paternalist labor management strategies. Manufacturers were mistaken, Louis-René Villermé argued, if they thought that miserable workers would make good workers:

And what to say about the indifference of those masters who never have a word of encouragement for their workers, who never see them outside the workshops, who never address a single word to them, who only respond to their questions with a hard or offensive monosyllable, and who have pushed the naiveté of their egoism to the point of admitting to me that in the interest of the worker himself, it was good for him always to be in the grasp of poverty, because that way, they said to me, he would not be a bad example to his children, and his misery would guarantee his good behavior.<sup>31</sup>

Instead, material comfort, stability, and security would inspire hard work and loyalty on the part of workers and assure domestic harmony within the working-class family.<sup>32</sup> In addition, well-organized and happy working-class families, economists argued, would ensure social peace as well as economic prosperity.<sup>33</sup>

Given that paternalist discipline was a technique of discipline and control, an interventionist strategy, a form of gentle and productive violence, as well as a strategy for solving a problem that ought not to have existed, it represented a disciplinary crisis for political economy. How could economists advocate intervention into the private lives of workers without invalidating the natural and universal principle of *laissez-faire* upon which their science and its authority rested? Political economist

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<sup>29</sup> Louis Reybaud, “La condition morale, intellectuelle et matérielle des ouvriers qui vivent de l’industrie du coton,” *Journal des économistes* 2d ser. 39 (April 1861): 15. Also, Jean-Gustave Courcelle-Seneuil, *Traité théorique et pratique des entreprises industrielles, commerciales et agricoles, ou Manuel des affaires* (Paris, 1855), 63-64.

<sup>30</sup> Henri Baudrillart, *Des rapports de la morale et de l’économie politique: cours professé au Collège de France* (Paris, 1860), 565.

<sup>31</sup> Louis-René Villermé, *Tableau de l’état physique et moral des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, de laine, et de soie* (Paris, 1840), 2:58.

<sup>32</sup> Villermé used the textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts as examples of industries in which the proprietors demonstrated a concern for their workers’ welfare, and as a result, prospered.

<sup>33</sup> Constantin Pecqueur, *Économie sociale* (Paris, 1839); Courcelle-Seneuil, *Traité théorique*; Frédéric Passy, “La famille et la société,” *Journal des économistes* 2d ser., 30 (July 1856): 59-83.

Louis Reybaud admitted this incompatibility, and the challenge facing his discipline, in his 1841 introductory essay to the first volume of the *Journal des économistes*. Political economy, Reybaud divulged, had so far been unable to solve the collective socioeconomic problems of the French working class.<sup>34</sup> While an inability to find solutions to problems was a situation faced by all sciences, Reybaud implied that political economy's particular failure marked a crossroads for his science.<sup>35</sup> While the masters of the science had solved the questions of value, capital, supply and demand, wages, taxes, and monopolies, what remained what Reybaud called the "living part"<sup>36</sup> of the science, what he suggested was the use of economic science to improve the condition of all producers, whether of the owning or the laboring classes.<sup>37</sup> If political economy had been accused of paying more attention to objects than to men, economists needed to confront this charge.<sup>38</sup> There was no greater reason for studying political economy, Reybaud noted, than to assist in the solution of the problems of labor, and economists needed to be willing, he implied, to admit the failures of their analyses:

Like all human knowledge, political economy has its doubts, its miscalculations, its chasms. It understands that the wealth of a people rests in its labor, but it has yet to find the law of distributive justice by which quantity of labor can determine that of enjoyment. It is unaware of the means by which to spare those unhappy people displaced by machines and left unemployed by competition from the tortures of hunger. Without the help of morality and charity, it can do nothing either for children weakened while still young, or for the elderly whose strength is consumed by industry. The natural equilibrium which political economy proclaims and which it invokes therefore does not suffice for calming all the agonies and for supporting all existences.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> While Reybaud did not use the term *la question sociale* in his essay, referring instead to "social difficulties," the "accidents of industrial life," and "diverse industrial and commercial infirmities," he nonetheless elaborated a host of social problems that were regularly grouped into this category during the nineteenth century. He mentioned the hunger suffered by people who had been replaced by machines; the illnesses suffered by the very young and the very old, both of whom worked; the coalitions of workers against masters and the monopolies of masters against workers. See Louis Reybaud, "Introduction," *Journal des économistes* 1 (1841): 7-10.

<sup>35</sup> Reybaud pointed out that while medicine had not yet cured all illnesses, nor philosophy solved the problem of existence, neither science was any less valuable or important for its failure (*Ibid.*, 9).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Why was this a remarkable confession? For many of Reybaud's predecessors and contemporaries, political economy was a natural science not unlike the exact sciences of physics, mathematics, and chemistry. Political economist Jean-Baptiste Say, who Reybaud considered one of the great masters of the science, had written of the need to apply the experimental methods of the physical sciences to political economy, treating social events as analogous to physical reactions studied by chemists and physicists. Like physics, he argued, political economy was an objective and concrete science that could be studied by observation, deduction, and logic.<sup>40</sup> It was the misfortune of Say's successors, however, to have discerned the significant differences between the science of physics and that of political economy. By the time Reybaud offered his confessions, political economists had recognized that they faced problems shared by few physical scientists: the difficulty of observation; the impossibility of experimentation; the inadequacy of scientific dispassion when dealing with human lives; the nagging ethical sentiment that asserted that working-class poverty would never be socially and morally desirable no matter how warranted it might appear to be; and the uncomfortable realization that behind the abstract, amoral, universal, and scientific category of Labor lay real flesh-and-blood human beings who might need direction, correction, regulation, and management.

If we borrow Michel Foucault's definition of government as "a form of activity aimed at shaping other people's conduct," then by mid-century political economists were beginning to recognize the necessity of governing workers, although they had once defined their science as one that by definition did not govern.<sup>41</sup> By the 1840s, they had acknowledged the need for government of the French working class (preferably not by the French state), and for their own participation in debates about the form that this government should take. If political economists once saw themselves as engaged with the abstract, universal, and scientific category of Labor, by mid-century they had come face-to-face with the human element, with workers and the need to discipline, re-make, and "govern" them.

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<sup>40</sup> For Say's conception of political economy as a science rather than an art, see Edgar Allix, "La méthode et la conception de l'économie politique dans l'œuvre de Jean-Baptiste Say," *Revue d'histoire des doctrines économiques et sociales* 4 (1911): 321-60.

<sup>41</sup> I have cited sociologist Giovanna Procacci's definition of the term "government"; see Giovanna Procacci, "Governing Poverty: Sources of the Social Question in Nineteenth-Century France," in *Foucault and the Writing of History* ed. Jan Goldstein (Oxford, 1994), 211. Procacci, however, drew upon Michel Foucault's own definition: "To govern...is to structure the possible field of action of others"; see Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2d ed., ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago, 1983), 221.

*La question sociale*, then, presented political economists with a real challenge. If left unchecked, it appeared to threaten French economic success. On the other hand, how were political economists to include “government”—social intervention and assistance—in economic science, resting as it did upon the universal law of *laissez-faire*? *La question sociale*, and political economists’ growing support of paternalism, thus appeared to disprove economists’ own theories, which in turn threatened not only to open the way for state intervention into the economy and industrial development, but to undermine the claims of political economy to institutional status on the grounds of scientific authority.

### Social Economy

The unexpected and unwanted knowledge that constituted *la question sociale* forced political economists to devise calculated strategies to protect their discipline’s theoretical foundations, its claims to scientific legitimacy, and its institutional opportunities. In order to contribute to discussions of *la question sociale*, and to advocate industrial paternalism as the solution to this question without invalidating the basic tenets of their discipline, political economists created an odd category, often (but not exclusively) labeled *économie sociale* (social economy). The creation of *économie sociale* afforded protection to the borders that political economy had originally delineated: borders that defined it as a science resting upon the precept of *laissez-faire*. Social economy was not political economy; in fact, the difference was what made social economy useful to economists. Social economy offered political economists a space—conveniently proximal yet distant—to house everything that did not fit into their narrowly-defined and inflexible science. It offered economists a means of splitting off the management or government of human subjects (the responsibility of social economy), from the study of natural laws (the responsibility of political economy). Thus, social economy offered political economy a means of self-discipline to manage and control the unexpected knowledge that had escaped its disciplinary framework.

Political economy’s mid-nineteenth-century vulnerability to the implications of *la question sociale* serves to link the history of the economic discipline to the larger history of the nineteenth-century professions and human sciences. Any discipline or profession is vulnerable, according to sociologist Andrew Abbott, “to changes in the objective character of its central tasks”; every discipline encounters problems it cannot perfectly explain, or “crucial anomalies.”<sup>42</sup> For theorists such as Abbott, it is the abstraction of the knowledge system that lies behind any profession, academic or not, that offers a means of confronting the constant challenges a profession faces. “Abstraction

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago, 1988), 39. For the phrase “crucial anomalies,” see page 50.

enables survival,” writes Abbott, and in the case of political economy, it was its ability to employ abstraction, to “define old problems in new ways,” that allowed it to overcome the challenge posed by *la question sociale*.<sup>43</sup>

This process of incorporating new material into a discipline, of employing abstraction in order to confront the vulnerability caused by changed circumstances, is never straightforward, however. Thus, as nineteenth-century French economists discussed the anomaly of *la question sociale* (while slowly inventing the new category of social economy to contain it) they tried to ascertain the disciplinary relationship between political and social economy. They spoke not of Labor and *laissez-faire*, but of workers, their misery, and the best way to mitigate that misery. Social economy thus emerged from a collective process of reassessing, redefining, and adapting the new discipline of political economy, a process that I call the “disciplining” of political economy. It was the product of dozens of political economists trying to figure out which elements of their original theoretical framework needed to be changed, which problems could be accommodated, and which boundaries were safe and which were under siege.<sup>44</sup>

While political economists often disagreed over the definition and boundaries of social economy throughout the nineteenth century, their writing on the practical subject of social economy—*la question sociale*—was remarkably consistent. Many prominent economists contributed to the growing body of literature on *économie sociale*: Eugène Buret, Théodore Fix, Louis Blanqui, Armand Audiganne, Louis-René Villermé, Émile Levasseur, and finally, Louis Reybaud, who wrote an entire series on what he called the *condition morale, matérielle et intellectuelle* of French workers. Possibly the best known piece of social economic writing during the nineteenth century was Louis Villermé’s *Tableau de l’état physique et*

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<sup>43</sup> Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 30.

<sup>44</sup> These debates within political economy, these efforts to deal with “crucial anomalies” (to borrow Andrew Abbott’s phrase) and thus professional vulnerabilities, were not dilemmas specific to political economy. Jan Goldstein, for instance, has described the debates among the French psychiatric profession over the diagnostic category monomania, a category that would go in and out of fashion in the span of 40 years. A product of the psychiatric profession’s “tactical considerations,” monomania only received scientific scrutiny from French psychiatrists once their collective status as an official medical specialty and an institutionalized profession had been assured. See Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, U.K., 1987), ch. 5. A similar internal debate rocked the French medical profession in the late nineteenth century. Martha Hildreth has described the controversy over the validity of a miasmatic explanation of typhoid. Debates over whether typhoid was transmitted by water or air began in the 1850s, and ended only in the 1890s, when the critical role of water was finally clearly demonstrated and universally accepted. See Martha L. Hildreth, *Doctors, Bureaucrats, and Public Health in France, 1888-1902* (New York, 1987), ch. 2.



*moral des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, de laine, et de soie*, published in 1840. Since Villermé's text, and especially his unforgettable picture of the supposed case of incest he encountered in the city of Lille, is so well-known, I have chosen to focus on Louis Reybaud as representative of social economic thinking and writing among political economists.

On paper, social economy took the form of: a) detailed descriptions of working-class living and working conditions, with a strong emphasis on what economists labeled "morality"; b) intricate and ambiguous explanations of workers' problems; and c) possible solutions to these problems, with an emphasis on the strengths of industrial paternalism and the flaws of state-administered solutions.

This formula was repeated in all social economic writings, with Reybaud's no exception. Within his analyses of the French cotton, wool, iron, and silk industries were stock descriptions, explanations, conclusions, and judgments about the social question with which most economists would have agreed.

True to his titles, Reybaud spent considerable time describing the moral, material, and intellectual conditions of workers' lives in industrial regions, focusing on wages, workplace conditions, the quality of homes and home lives, whether or not women and children worked, and what form sociability took. As was the case with most social economic tract authors, he concluded that industry had improved workers' material conditions and debased their moral conditions. The natural links between workers and their employers, and between family members, had been weakened if not destroyed in industrial regions, leaving workers to their *goûts de dissipation*, the foremost of which was alcoholic excess.<sup>45</sup>

Reybaud was uncertain about the causes of this debased moral condition, an ambiguity characteristic of much social economics. On the one hand, he indicted what he saw to be workers' own vulnerability to immorality: their bad habits, lack of foresight, and ignorance. Insufficient wages were not the problem. Intelligently used they would be sufficient for all workers' needs.<sup>46</sup> However, workers using wages for alcohol, or for the theatre, or for unnecessary luxuries, were condemned to a life of physical squalor. Workers also exhibited what Reybaud considered to be a foolish and self-defeating obstinacy. He described, for instance, workers in the textile city of Lille who, when evacuated from insalubrious cellar housing, chose to move to equally noxious housing in small, dirty, unsanitary alleys rather than in the newer, healthier neighborhoods constructed for them by industrialists.<sup>47</sup> Or the case of Alsatian workers

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<sup>45</sup> Louis Reybaud, "La condition morale, intellectuelle et matérielle des ouvriers qui vivent de l'industrie du coton," *Journal des économistes*, 2d ser., 39 (Jan. 1861): 23.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-1.

who preferred to buy their bread at full price in local bakeries rather than at wholesale price at bakeries run by industrialists:

Can it be believed? In more than one case, workers refuse to profit from this advantage. Prejudice is so incurable and defiance so deeply engrained in this class that some among them insist upon seeing speculation where there is only generosity.... For some it is a habit, for others the ease of credit which leaves them more money for their cabaret expenses.<sup>48</sup>

However, Reybaud implied, workers' misery could not be blamed entirely on workers. Greedy employers contributed. Although by mid-century many employers recognized their moral duty to, and responsibility for, their workers, there were still those who "thought more of labor than of men, more of their own interests than of their duties."<sup>49</sup> Such was the case with employers who overlooked their workers' bad habits, thereby undermining the efforts of some employers to eradicate problems of drunkenness, absenteeism, and financial waste. Such disregard for workers' well-being, whether material or moral, was, according to Reybaud, inexcusable:

The reason really stems from the indifference of an industrialist toward anything that does not absolutely affect his business. With regard to discipline in the workshops, he is like iron; breaches of discipline, were they not punished, would cause him losses. He therefore deals severely with them, using fines and expulsions. With regard to outside discipline, he is less rigid, if not downright unconcerned. The worker has completed his task, received his wages; little does it matter if a part [of those wages] is diverted from the family to the cabaret. The industrialist doesn't have to intervene; he believes himself to be completely uninterested.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, Reybaud suggested that the economy itself might have had something to do with workers' misery. Although hesitant on this point, at times he implied that the natural, balanced laws governing the economy did not always work perfectly. In particular, he pointed out that although there was a natural equilibrium between supply and demand, it could take time to be established. In the meantime, workers suffered. The misery of this transitional period could be aggravated by the fact that employers had resources that workers did not:

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<sup>48</sup> Louis Reybaud, "La condition morale, intellectuelle et matérielle des ouvriers qui vivent de l'industrie du coton," *Journal des économistes*, 2d ser., 39 (April 1861): 13.

<sup>49</sup> Louis Reybaud, "La condition morale, intellectuelle et matérielle des ouvriers qui vivent de l'industrie du coton," *Journal des économistes*, 2d ser., 40 (Oct. 1861): 26.

<sup>50</sup> Louis Reybaud, *Rapport sur la condition morale, intellectuelle et matérielle des ouvriers qui vivent de l'industrie de la laine* (Paris, 1865), 90.

The employer is better-armed against [the worker] than [the worker] is against the employer. From this stems a certain ability on the part of employers to regulate the conditions of the market according to their needs and at the moment which appears the most convenient.<sup>51</sup>

Reybaud's uncertainty about the economic causes of working-class misery was echoed throughout social economic texts. In 1845, for instance, the conservative economist Théodore Fix argued that the third most important cause of misery (after workers' personal immorality and employers' greedy self-interest) was the very condition of being a worker. Because workers were forced to sell their labor power in order to guarantee their physical survival, they were naturally subject to overwork, less-than-perfect working conditions, corrupting influences, and the impossibility of acquiring an education: all conditions that led to misery.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Louis Villermé admitted that inhuman living conditions were not always the result of extravagance and dissolution, that wages could often be insufficient no matter workers' degree of foresight and thrift, and that the instability of workers' lives meant that any unexpected illness, recession, or lay-off could push workers from barely solvent to destitute. As if recognizing the significance of this admission, however, Villermé immediately countered by arguing that generally workers' wages were indeed sufficient, and that misery was due primarily to their misuse of these wages.<sup>53</sup>

Whatever their uncertainty as to the causes of workers' misery, Reybaud and others were confident about its solution. Like many industrialists, by the mid-nineteenth century Reybaud had begun to argue that industrial paternalism offered a remedy for workers' problems. In his description of the paternalism of Alsatian industrialists and what he called their "attention to the large questions of social economy" [*grandes questions d'économie sociale*] Reybaud argued that:

One could say...that the employer puts himself in place of the worker, and wants to think, act, calculate for him.... In the gorges of the Vosges mountains as on the plains, one will find this vigilant attention given to the condition of man, this paternal sentiment which succeeds through the most ingenious methods of turning him from the bad and conducting him toward the good...<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Louis Reybaud, "La condition morale des ouvriers," *Journal des économistes*, 2d ser., 39 (April 1861): 13.

<sup>52</sup> Théodore Fix, "Observations sur l'état des classes ouvrières," *Journal des économistes* 12 (Nov. 1845): 294.

<sup>53</sup> Villermé, *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers*, 2:15-16.

<sup>54</sup> Louis Reybaud, "La condition morale, intellectuelle et matérielle des ouvriers qui vivent de l'industrie du coton," *Journal des économistes*, 2d ser., 39 (Feb. 1861): 79.

What about those industrialists who refused to shoulder their moral responsibility? Here Reybaud demonstrated the degree to which mid-century political economists had already diverged from the assumptions of their predecessors. Reluctantly he admitted, “if good will was lacking among our manufacturers, the law ought to stand in for it.”<sup>55</sup> However, state intervention could only be the last resort, and it could never be as effective a remedy for working-class misery as paternalism. In Alsace, Reybaud pointed out: “there is no administrative regulation, as demanding as it might be, that could bring about the equivalent of those institutions which I saw there in action, and which are the product of spontaneous impulses.”<sup>56</sup>

In fact, legal action simply did not offer what workers really needed: From all this I have only one conclusion to draw, which is that it is difficult to move into the legal domain that which obviously belongs in the moral domain. There is no deterrent which can replace man’s conscience; he can respect nothing when he no longer respects himself. How can we give him back this love of duty and this feeling of personal dignity which are the great safeguards of life? Through education and also through example.<sup>57</sup>

Implicit in this statement was the prevailing economic argument that industrialists, who could provide education and example, held the keys to the solution of *la question sociale*.

What this quick synopsis of “social economic” thinking conceals, however, is the convoluted series of debates that underlay and accompanied such thinking, and that constituted the “disciplining” of the discipline of political economy. The appearance of “social economy” as exemplified by Reybaud’s work was not unproblematic, immediate, or uniform. Political economists’ discussions about *la question sociale* were always accompanied by another series of discussions about what economists were doing when they spoke about efforts to render workers more productive and less political through working-class housing, gardens, and retirement funds. Were they doing political economy or social economy? Were they doing the “science” or the “art” of political economy? Were they doing “old” or “new” political economy? And if they were doing something other than political economy, then what was the relationship between their discussions of prices, wages, and international tariffs, and their discussions of misery, paternalism, housing, morality, and gardens? It was through this constant debate, not simply over *la question sociale*, but also over the labels, definitions, and boundaries that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>56</sup> Louis Reybaud, “La condition des ouvriers,” *Journal des économistes*, 2d ser., 39 (Feb. 1861): 179.

<sup>57</sup> Louis Reybaud, “La condition morale, intellectuelle et matérielle des ouvriers qui vivent de l’industrie du coton,” *Journal des économistes*, 2d ser., 41 (April 1862): 70-1.

ought to be placed upon economists' discussions of *la question sociale*, that political economists invented the category of social economy, a category that operated both outside and alongside political economy and responded to the practical historical circumstances in which political economists found themselves.

Political economists' debate over the science and the art of political economy offers one particular vantage point from which to observe how economists disciplined, or managed, the "crucial anomaly" that was *la question sociale*. In an article entitled "The Economic and Social Role of the Engineer" in the 1906 issue of the engineering journal *Le Génie Civil*, author Maurice Bellom explicitly linked political economy and social economy.<sup>58</sup> While political economy, he argued, was a science that studied the laws regulating human efforts to acquire and enjoy material goods, social economy was the art of improving the material and moral condition of workers and the mutual relations between employers and workers. Political economy had created social economy, and social economy would always be based upon and subordinate to political economy, a subordination warranted, first, because of political economy's seniority (political economy dated from the seventeenth century and social economy only from the nineteenth), and second, because of political economy's status as a science.

Bellom was not the first, however, to have distinguished between an "art" and a "science" of political economy. In fact, the contrast between art and science, and its implications for the relationship between political and social economy, was the subject of lengthy debates in the *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique* (1852-1853) and the *Nouveau dictionnaire d'économie politique* (1891). According to Charles Coquelin, the editor of the *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique* and author of its entry on political economy:

An art consists of a series of precepts or rules to follow, a science of the understanding of certain phenomena, or certain observed and revealed connections.... An art advises, prescribes, directs, a science observes, exposes, and explains.... Thus, to observe and describe real phenomena, that is science; to dictate precepts, prescribe rules, that is art.<sup>59</sup>

Consistent with this original definition, the *Nouveau dictionnaire d'économie politique*, published 40 years later, defined a science as the study of natural, permanent, and universal phenomena. In contrast, an art was the product of human actions and decisions; it studied temporary,

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<sup>58</sup> Maurice Bellom, "Le rôle économique et sociale de l'ingénieur," *Le Génie Civil* 50 (Nov. 1906): 42-3.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Coquelin, "Économie politique," in *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*, 2 vols., ed. Charles Coquelin and G. U. Guillaumin (Paris, 1852-3), 1:645.

variable, and human phenomena.<sup>60</sup> Hence, whereas a science remained constant and universally valid, an art naturally evolved. Finally, an art studied existing conditions with an eye toward improving them; as economist Courcelle-Seneuil argued in 1878, the object of an art was to serve human needs.<sup>61</sup>

Given these definitions, what was political economy? According to the editor of the *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*, political economy was both a science and an art because it encompassed explanations of natural economic phenomena as well as advice, precepts, and rules.<sup>62</sup> Although Adam Smith had defined political economy more as an art and Jean-Baptiste Say had defined it more as a science, both were correct. Political economy was simultaneously the study of human industry, and the study of wealth and its increase on behalf of all people. The science of political economy studied how human beings exerted themselves, while the art of political economy studied the results of those efforts.

By mid-century, this notion of political economy as both a science and an art had become a constant theme among most economists. By the time the *Nouveau dictionnaire d'économie politique* was published in 1891, the art of political economy had been defined as encompassing the effects of industrialization and the search for possible solutions:

Applied political economy is an art which has for a long time been limited to the search for the conditions by which a people can become as rich as possible. Today, this goal is mingling with the goal of the social art [*l'art social*]: to search for the conditions by which society can keep alive the greatest number of people in the best possible conditions.<sup>63</sup>

The relationship between the science and art of political economy was a complementary one, economists argued. Without each other, both were diminished:

It is not good that scientific truths remain sterile, and the only manner of using them is to deduce an art from them. There are, as we have already said, tight links of kinship between the science and the art. Science lends to art its knowledge, it rectifies its procedures, it enlightens and directs its course. Without the help of science, art can advance only gropingly, stumbling at every step.

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<sup>60</sup> See Fernand Faure, "Science and Art," in *Nouveau dictionnaire d'économie politique*, 2 vols., ed. Léon Say (Paris, 1891-2), 2:796-97; Joseph Chailley-Bert, "Introduction," in *Nouveau dictionnaire d'économie politique*, 1:v; and Courcelle-Seneuil, "Économie politique," *Nouveau dictionnaire d'économie politique*, 1:764-65.

<sup>61</sup> Courcelle-Seneuil, "Science, application, enseignement de l'économie politique," *Journal des économistes*, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., 73 (May 1878): 225-43.

<sup>62</sup> Coquelin, "Économie politique," *Dictionnaire*, 1:646.

<sup>63</sup> Courcelle-Seneuil, "Économie politique," *Nouveau dictionnaire*, 1: 764.

On the other hand, it is art which highlights the truths that science has discovered, and without which science would remain sterile.<sup>64</sup>

No longer was the goal of the science of political economy to remain aloof from daily life and from the consequences of the economic laws and phenomena it observed, described, and explained. Instead, “a science is destined to serve: it is an exercise with a view to action and struggle.”<sup>65</sup>

In their attempt to wrestle with the relationship between the science and art of political economy, certain political economists began to reconsider the history of their discipline as a way of legitimizing their new concern with *la question sociale* and paternalism. Here again one catches a glimpse of a discipline engaged in self-discipline, of a discipline engaged in rethinking, and thus protecting, a framework, theoretical assumptions, and borders, all of which had been called into question by unanticipated information and new circumstances. By the mid-nineteenth century, French economists began to ask themselves if the founders of the discipline had intended political economy to be a narrow, wealth-based science or a broadly-based “moral” science, and where, when, and how the science had gone astray, if that was indeed what had happened.

Much contemporary historiography on both Adam Smith, the architect of classical political economy, and Jean-Baptiste Say, often viewed as Smith’s French popularizer, has focused on disproving the claim that it was first Smith, and then even more egregiously Say, who changed the science of political economy from a broad social science to a narrow study of wealth.<sup>66</sup> French economists of the mid-nineteenth century had not yet come to this same conclusion, however, and discussions within economic circles thus revolved around the issue of what Adam Smith and his French followers (Jean-Baptiste Say in particular) had intended

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<sup>64</sup> Coquelin, “Économie politique,” *Dictionnaire*, 1:647.

<sup>65</sup> Courcelle-Seneuil, “Économie politique,” *Nouveau dictionnaire*, 1:770.

<sup>66</sup> Historians of Adam Smith, for instance, have focused on the relationship between Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*. Whereas the two works were often regarded as contradictory, constituting what is often known as the “Adam Smith problem,” scholars have begun to argue instead that both were part of Smith’s attempt to create a social science rather than just an economic one, taught at the University of Edinburgh under the heading of “moral science.” According to scholars, Smith’s aim was to locate the social bonds that link human beings. Sympathy, the subject of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, was one such social bond; self-interest, and the self-command and mutual dependence it required, both elucidated in *The Wealth of Nations*, were the others. The most recent reassessment of Adam Smith is Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001). Richard Whatmore’s recent book on Jean-Baptiste Say attempts a similar reassessment of the “historical myth” surrounding Say and his political economy. See Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say’s Political Economy* (Oxford, 2000).

political economy to be. For economists, the relationship between Smith and Say and their respective conceptions of political economy was never unambiguous. By mid-century, however, a common consensus—that political economy had become a narrowly-defined and inflexible science of wealth somewhere between the publication of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 and Say's *Traité d'économie politique* in 1803—appears to have developed among most French economists. Between Smith and Say, political economy had gone off-track, and it was thus the duty of political economy to recover what had been lost: the humanitarian perspective, the broad concerns, the art.

In his entry on political economy in the *Nouveau dictionnaire d'économie politique*, for instance, economist Courcelle-Seneuil argued that while Adam Smith's essential contribution to the new science had been to limit its scope to the study of wealth, this did not mean that Smith had intended to dispense with issues of application or art. For Smith, political economy was still an art that offered precepts designed for governmental application. According to Courcelle-Seneuil, it was this attention to both science and art, to application and theory, which earned the eighteenth century the label “the Golden Age of political economy.” The next century, however, was given no such glorious label. During the nineteenth century, Courcelle-Seneuil argued, political economy had renounced its links to art and application. Jean-Baptiste Say and his followers had abandoned the concern with application, and had begun to describe political economy as a science offering analysis rather than advice. Political economy became a theoretical and abstract study of wealth, not the first time such a charge had been leveled at Say.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, however, Courcelle-Seneuil applauded those late nineteenth-century economists who were returning political economy to its original breadth and depth, abandoning its temporary and unnatural narrowness in favor of the older definition of political economy as a truly social science.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In an 1815 letter to Say, Physiocrat Dupont de Nemours wrote: “you have overly narrowed the scope of political economy [*Vous avez trop retréci la carrière de l'économie politique*] in treating it only as the science of wealth. It is the science of natural law, as it should be, applied to civilized societies. It is the science of constitutions, which teaches and will teach, not only that which governments must not do for their own interest and for that of their nations, or for their wealth, but also that which they must not be able to do before God, under pain of meriting the hatred and the scorn of men, dethronement during their lifetime, and the bloody whip of history after their death.” Cited in Catherine Larrère, *L'invention de l'économie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Du droit naturel à la physiocratie* (Paris, 1992), 194. The original citation is from Dupont de Nemours, *Correspondance avec Jean-Baptiste Say*, 22 April 1815, cited in Eugène Daire, *Les physiocrates*, volume de la “Collection des Économistes” (Paris, 1846), 395-96.

<sup>68</sup> Courcelle-Seneuil, “Aperçu historique sur l'économie politique,” in *Nouveau dictionnaire d'économie politique*, 2 vols., ed. Léon Say (Paris, 1891-2), 1:782.



Despite all this rumination on art and science, political economists never explicitly equated the art of political economy with the term *économie sociale*. What is unmistakable, and links the art of political economy and social economy, is the affinity between the concerns situated in discussions of the art of political economy, and those situated in writings like Louis Reybaud's and often referred to as "social economy." Economists' definition of the art of political economy as the study of variable and human phenomena, its method as advice and prescription, and its purpose the application of general truths to ameliorate social conditions, corresponded with discussions of the unexpected consequences of industrialization and advocacy of paternalist labor management. Working out the relationship between the science and the art of political economy was thus akin to working out the relationship between the original framework of political economy and the new problems that cast doubt on that framework.

Through these discussions of art and science and of the relationship between political and social economy, one perceives economists' efforts to grapple with the questions at the heart of their mid-century dilemma: how would their discipline be affected by a new emphasis on the consequences of industrialization, and in particular, an advocacy of paternalist management strategies? How would political economy's self-declared status as a science with "universal laws" have to change? How would the discipline have to refashion the relationships it had originally posited between the state and the individual, economic process and individual practice, employer and employee, bourgeois and worker? How could, in short, political economists re-discipline their discipline, harnessing everything that had escaped the narrow disciplinary framework of political economy and re-grafting it onto their self-proclaimed science, thus neutralizing the disciplinary vulnerability caused by *la question sociale*?

## Conclusion

I began this paper with a description of the statue of Eugène Schneider that once occupied pride of place in the small town of Le Creusot. Although aesthetically insignificant, this statue is historically significant in symbolizing a solution to the nineteenth-century problem of *la question sociale*, a solution that produced a period of crisis and rupture for the discipline of French political economy. For nineteenth-century French political economists, most of who probably never saw this statue or even knew of its existence, the paternalist discipline explicitly embodied in the statue of Eugène Schneider and his two workers nonetheless represented unexpected and unwanted knowledge, a "crucial anomaly," as well as a serious challenge to their institutional ambitions. If, by the mid-nineteenth century, industrialists had adopted paternalism as a solution to *la question sociale* and the problem of discipline, French economists had begun to adopt *économie sociale* as a solution to the problem that *la question sociale* posed for the discipline of political economy.

As a poorly defined, flexible category operating on the margins of political economy (the detritus of political economy), social economy afforded political economists the opportunity to make misery and its paternalist solution, the flaws in political economy's supposedly self-regulating, balanced economic laws, part of political economy's disciplinary framework. If nineteenth-century political economy was a discipline that aspired to scientific legitimacy and, thus, power, social economy both encompassed all the realities that failed to fit within the narrowly defined theoretical framework of political economy, and provided a protective barrier around it. It was this protective barrier that allowed political economy to "discipline its discipline," to separate its social concerns from its theoretical assumptions, and consequently protect itself as a scientific discipline resting on the foundation of *laissez-faire*. By constructing a new category in which to place the problematic issues confronting them, economists made it possible to continue to define political economy as an objective science employing observation and logic, sustain its basic assumptions about *laissez-faire*, and continue to demand institutional legitimacy on the grounds of its scientific authority.