Early British Socialism and the "Religion of the New Moral World"

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis will be concerned with the question of the relationship between Owenite socialists and religion. In this thesis I will seek to untangle and disambiguate existing scholarly accounts of the relationship between Owenite socialism and religion. I will then identify how Owenites offer a re-conception of the nature of 'religion' as advanced through knowledge of the natural and social world, as a prospective source of solidarity which could serve as the unifying bond for communities, and as constituted by ethical conduct. I will demonstrate how these Owenites' critique of contemporary religion was shaped by the particular conditions of the early nineteenth century, conditions which represented a problem to which they offered a solution. I then show how this solution was formed by drawing upon the traditions of natural theology, popular religion, deism, and Rational Dissent. I show how this solution was formed through a sincere and considered reflection upon the problem of religious truth. I will then show the importance of this reimagination of religion to their understanding of socialism. I demonstrate that these Owenites understood their socialism to be, in part, a project of religious reform, as rivalling the Oxford Movement and as a successor to the Reformation. Their religious interests were not an eccentric adornment to their socialism, an outdated residue yet to be shed and encumbering the development of a mature socialism, or merely instrumental to their temporal goals. Instead, their ambitions of religious reform were grounded in the philosophical preoccupations which animated their socialism. They conceived theological falsehoods as an obstacle to the triumph of socialism. And they argued that one should become a socialist, in part, precisely because it created the conditions for the popularisation of religious virtue. I conclude by identifying some implications of the argument of this thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the opening section of this chapter (Section 1.1), I introduce the Owenite socialists, describing their activities, their philosophy, and their influence upon subsequent radical thought. I emphasise their novelty, creativity, and the breadth of their influence.

In Section 1.2, I identify the question which animates this thesis, which concerns the relationship between Owenite socialists and religion. I then describe how the argument of these thesis will unfold. In Chapter 2, I survey existing accounts of the relationship between Owenite socialists and religion, accounts which differ in their interpretation of the *nature* of this relationship and its *importance* to our understanding of socialism. In Chapter 3, I show how some of these conflicting accounts can be reconciled by describing one Owenite re-imagination of the concept of religion, as tied to increasing knowledge of the natural and social world, as a source of solidarity, and as primarily manifested in ethical conduct. This is an account of religion as both socially valuable and as central to the theory and practice of Owenite socialism. In Chapter 4, I place this re-imagination into the religious context of early nineteenth-century Britain. I show how the Owenite critique of religion was a response to particular features of their own context, such as the conservatism of the dominant theology and the existence of denominational division, rather than a critique of religion as such. And I note the positive influences which shaped their engagement with religion, demonstrating how their account of religion emerged from within existing theological debates. In Chapter 5, I present three scholarly accounts of religious interests as unimportant to socialism or as un-socialist. I then reject these accounts, showing instead that many Owenites understood themselves to be undertaking a project of religious reform which was grounded in their socialism and essential to the achievement of their goals. In Chapter 6, I survey some accounts of the relationship between socialism and religion more broadly. I note that consideration of this relationship is often plagued by ambiguity and equivocation, and I disambiguate some different ways of thinking about this relationship. The goal of this Chapter is to set the discussion of this thesis in a wider context.

In the next section of this Introduction (Section 1.3), I describe the economic volatility and political unrest of early nineteenth-century Britain, and note some of the technological and cultural changes of

this 'Age of Machinery'. This was the turbulent world of increasing productive possibility, periodic economic crisis, and romantic nostalgia, which Owenites faced and in which they formed their socialism.

In Section 1.4, I clarify the geographical scope of this thesis and explain my use of terms such as 'Anglican' and 'religion' even while discussing *British* socialism and an overwhelmingly *Christian* context.

1.1 Background

The emergence and flowering of Owenism in the second quarter of the nineteenth century represents a founding moment for British socialism.[1] Owen himself has been widely credited as the 'Father of Socialism', the 'central figure of British socialism in the first half of the nineteenth century', the 'founder' or 'god-father' of co-operation, and the 'outstanding leader of the British working classes' in the 1830s.[2] Engels announced that 'English socialism arose with Owen' and Tony Blair claimed Owen as an 'ethical socialist' ancestor of New Labour.[3] Owen has also been anointed as the first sociologist and credited as a pioneer in primary and infant education.[4] Owenism represented 'the first ideologically formulated version of socialism' and the first organised co-operative movement.[5] They were the first communitarians, who exerted a formative influence upon trade unionism, and helped to shape Secularism.[6]

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[1] Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 86–101; Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 236.
[2] Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 197; Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 86; 101; Cole, *Robert Owen of New Lanark*, 75; Joad, *Robert Owen, Idealist*, 8–9; Miliband, 'The Politics of Robert Owen', 23; Beer, *A History of British Socialism*, 131; Podmore, *Robert Owen: A Biography*, II:585–86; Wallas, 'The Beginning of Modern Socialism', 44; Bennett, *The Hidden Oak*, 35.
[3] Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 236; Blair, *New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country*, 238–39.
[4] Pūras, 'Robert Owen in the History of the Social Sciences'; Stewart and McCann, *Educational Innovators*; For Owen's influence as an educationalist in Spain, see Castellano and Pachón, 'Robert Owen's Quest for the "New Moral World" in a Non-Industrialized Country'; For the influence upon French Saint-Simonians of Owen's ideas about moral education as a means of achieving social change, see Schwanck, 'Robert Owen's Influence on French Republicanism in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', 8–10.
[5] O'Brien, 'Robert Owen and the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union', 87; Wainwright, *A New Politics from the Left*, 90.
[6] Wainwright, *A New Politics from the Left*, 90; Tam, *The Evolution of Communitarian Ideas*, 3–4; Cole, *Attempts at General Union*; Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*.

Owenites frequently distilled their philosophy into a handful of slogans: labour was the source of all wealth, competition was a social evil, and 'the character of man was formed for him, not by him'. This latter claim, often termed the 'doctrine of circumstances', entailed that human character was highly malleable and that education was an essential mechanism of social change.[7] Additionally, it was argued that cooperative social and economic arrangements were more productive and felicific than individualistic ones, and that well-managed technological change could abolish the economic volatility of early nineteenth-century Britain. Radical critiques were also offered of the marriage contract, the nuclear family, and the gendered division of labour, although these were promoted unevenly and the ostensible commitment to gender equality was not always practically pursued. Owenite socialism is most distinctive for its theory of social transformation, which envisaged change occurring not through the intervention of the state or on account of a collective mobilisation, but through the establishment of a network of broadly autarkic communities of several thousand people. It was imagined that if a single community were successfully established, then its benefits would be so obvious that the model would be swiftly imitated. This deeply optimistic theory of change was adopted from Robert Owen (1771-1858), who played an important practical and symbolic role in the movement throughout its lifespan.

Owen had been the part-owner and manager of the New Lanark cotton mills near Glasgow, where he improved living conditions and implemented educational programmes for his workers. He then sought to generalise this model, initially to a plan for 'colonies' for the unemployed and then, soon after, as a template for broad societal transformation.[8] Owen's plans received attention from luminaries including the Duke of York (Queen Victoria's father), although William Cobbett memorably denounced the planned communities as 'parallelograms for paupers'.[9] Following a period seeking to popularise his plans, petitioning eminent politicians and giving speeches across Great Britain, Owen travelled to the United States of America in 1825 to found the New Harmony community in Indiana.

[7] Logie Barrow argues that such an account of environmental determinism was a common feature of an existing 'plebeian autodidact culture', in which 'the involvement of many independent-minded plebeians in a culture of self-education reinforced their openness to environmental strategies'. Barrow, 'Determinism and Environmentalism in Socialist Thought', 194; 202.
[8] Owen, *A New View of Society and Other Writings*, 159–69.
[9] *Cobbett's Weekly Political Pamphlet*, no.32, 18, (2 August 1817), 569-70.

On his journey to Indiana, Owen stopped in Washington DC to address the Houses of Congress and discuss his plan with President James Munroe, and with future Presidents John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson.[10] Owen had purchased the village of New Harmony from George Rapp, who had established a pietist community on the site a decade beforehand. New Harmony attracted eminent scientists including Thomas Maclure, the 'father of American geology' and Thomas Say, the 'father of descriptive entomology'.[11] However, as a community, it was an abject failure, and had broken apart by 1827. It was riven by divisions about the fairness of the system of payment, which was perceived to reward educated professionals at the cost of common labourers, and about governance arrangements, and a series of schisms quickly occurred.[12] Robert Owen and his son both blamed the residents, and several subsequent historians have happily followed suit, describing the town as populated by 'scores of cranks with curious hobbies', by 'crackpots, free-loaders, and adventurers whose presence in the town made success unlikely'.[13] Owen returned to Britain in 1828, but in his absence a movement had developed independently of his control. Over the subsequent two decades, the movement intersected with burgeoning co-operatives, with unionist militancy in the 1830s, and even, later, with Chartism.

The founding of communities always remained a primary goal of the movement. Besides New Harmony, only one other community was officially endorsed by Owen and by the foremost Owenite organisations, at Queenwood, Hampshire (1839-45).[14] Founded amidst fanfare and jubilation, the attempt to sustain Queenwood was to drain the movement of its reserves of energy and money. Concerns were raised that, in order to support the community, funds were being directed away from the salaries of the 'social missionaries' who lectured about Owenism across the country.[15] The community accrued mounting debts farming unproductive land with limited skills amidst poor weather conditions, and its collapse in 1845 largely brought an end to organised Owenism. There were other

[10] Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 108–9.
[11] Pitzer, 'The Original Boatload of Knowledge'.
[12] The splinter societies included i) Macluria (named, unsurprisingly, by William Maclure), ii) Feiba Peveli (named by Stedman Whitwell according to his plan for all place names to be determined by longitude and latitude to prevent the repetition), iii) a community known, rousingly, as 'Community No.4'. Wilson, *The Angel and the Serpent*, 153–54.
[13] Lockwood, *The New Harmony Movement*, 82; Wilson, *The Angel and the Serpent*, 116.
[14] New Harmony and Queenwood have each been the subject of comprehensive monographs: Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*; Taylor, *Visions of Harmony*.
[15] *New Moral World*, no.11, 46, 'Notes of a Looker-On' (13 May 1843), 366.

'unofficial' communities, such as Spa Fields in London (1821-3) or the Birkacre Co-operative Community near Chorley (1831-3), which developed organically from existing practices of cooperation.[16] Other communities were established by individual benefactors: Ralahine in County Clare (1831-3) was financed by John Vandeleur, and Manea Fen in Cambridgeshire (1838-41) by William Hodson.[17] Both communities met the same fate, collapsing when their backers lost their money. Ironically, given that betting was prohibited at Ralahine, Vandeleur gambled away his wealth in a Dublin club. More mundanely, William Hodson became bankrupt when a local bank collapsed. Scholars of Owenism have often focused upon these communities, with studies exploring the origins, workings, and ultimate failings of these short-lived experiments, and examining how they were intended to bring about social transformation.[18]

However, not all Owenite activity was confined to these communities. Early organisations included the Co-operative and Economical Society (founded in 1821), the London Co-operative Society (1824), and the Brighton Co-operative Trading Association (1827). Such names reflect how, during the 1820s, Owenite attention often focused upon consumer co-operatives, in which funds were pooled in order to purchase goods at wholesale prices, thereby reducing costs, controlling quality, and reducing the power of middlemen 'shopocrats'. While such organisations included a nominal commitment to the accumulation of funds to establish a community, they were primarily oriented towards the more immediate and incremental improvement of their members' lives. This cooperative activity entered a new phase with the establishment of the National Equitable Labour Exchange in London in 1832. The Exchange was a producer co-operative, in which those depositing goods were remunerated in a new currency, the 'labour note', which could then be redeemed to purchase other goods held by the exchange. Importantly, goods were valued according not to a market price, but instead to the number of hours typically invested in their production (in addition to the cost of the raw materials).[19] Although

[16] Bennett, *The Hidden Oak*, 66–72; Coates, 'Communities of Co-Operation', 47.
[17] Garnett, *Co-Operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities*, 100–129; Geoghegan, 'Ralahine'; Langdon, 'A Monument of Union'.
[18] Armytage, *Heavens Below*; Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*; Garnett, *Co-Operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities*; Langdon, 'Pocket Editions of the New Jerusalem'; Langdon, 'A Monument of Union'; Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*.
[19] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 54–56; Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 203–7; Oliver, 'The Labour Exchange Phase of the Co-Operative Movement'. The concern with currency was a particular preoccupation of John Gray, who advocated in his *The Social System* for a nationally-coordinated and centrally-

the Exchange soon ceased operations, and the Birmingham Exchange (July 1833 – Summer 1834) followed swiftly thereafter, it represented an innovative attempt to create a new currency in order to ensure that the contribution of labour to production was fully rewarded. It was not greeted with universal enthusiasm; Owen dismissed the Labour Exchange as 'a bagatelle - a mere pawnbroker's shop, in comparison of the superior establishments which we shall speedily have it in our power to institute'.[20]

The London Exchange had developed and formalised existing practices of cooperative trading among London tailors, and it was common for other Owenite organisations to be shaped by the local traditions from which their supporters emerged.[21] The movement's philosophy was propagated through a network of itinerant lecturers known as 'social missionaries', through a handful of journals, and through the relentless travel of Robert Owen himself. This generated an Owenite orthodoxy, but one which was tinged with geographical diversity. For example, Brighton's cooperative bakers or Scotland's victualling societies cherished their own localised traditions of mutuality and solidarity, and so were ambivalent about the founding of a distant community as a means of social transformation.[22] Agrarian socialists in London, who had previously promoted Thomas Spence's programme of land nationalisation, and who flowed into Owenite organisations, brought with them expectations about the state as an agent of social change.[23] By contrast, Lancashire and Yorkshire Owenites were more concerned with co-operative trading, and were to influence the Rochdale Pioneers who were to make the co-operative movement internationally famous.[24] Regional tensions also emerged over where Congresses should be held, a community founded, and the primary Owenite journal, the *New Moral World*, based. These geographical tensions also intersected with other social fissures; North

planned economic system in which the value of goods would be denominated in labour notes. The Owenite scheme for labour notes was also adopted by Josiah Warren for his Cincinnati Time Store, although this was set within a philosophy of individualist anarchism. Gray, *The Social System*; Warren, *The Practical Anarchist*.

[20] *Crisis*, no. 3, 7&8, 'Proceedings of the Fifth Co-operative Congress' (19 October 1833), 62.

[21] Oliver, 'The Labour Exchange Phase of the Co-Operative Movement', 361–64.

[22] Durr, 'William King of Brighton', 19–20; Fraser, 'Owenite Socialism in Scotland', 60–64.

[23] McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 194–200; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 672.

[24] As a reflection of the influence of Owenism, three of the Rochdale Pioneers donated some of their 'divi', the dividend paid by the co-operative, to Queenwood. This is, in a way, ironic, given that the innovation of the 'divi' represented the abandonment of the Owenite vision of co-operation as subordinated to the goal of community-founding. See Binyon, *The Christian Socialist Movement in England*, 51–53; Fraser, *Alexander Campbell and the Search for Socialism*, 91–92; Siméon, *Robert Owen's Experiment at New Lanark*, 143; Thornes, 'Change and Continuity in the Development of Co-Operation', 30–35.

Staffordshire Owenites, who were closed tied to a working-class culture of independence, were particularly resistant to the influence of the more philosophically-inclined middle classes.[25]

Owenite socialism appealed primarily to artisans and those in the more respectable reaches of the working classes. However, the movement also drew some support from middle-class philanthropists and affluent benefactors who, while small in number, featured prominently, whether as theoreticians such as Irish landowner William Thompson, or as local leaders such as Liverpool merchant John Finch or Sheffield accountant Isaac Ironside.[26] Their resources of time, money, and literacy allowed them greater opportunities to write and publish pamphlets and tracts, or to travel to meetings and Congresses. For this reason, it is more likely that their voices will figure in the historical record and to be heard amidst 'the vast silence that has swallowed up most of mankind's thinking'.[27] If one seeks to comprehend how Owenites understood their socialism, then one must be sensitive to the danger of these figures exercising a disproportionate influence upon one's conception of the movement. As a way of tempering this influence, in this thesis I will draw primarily upon the main Owenite journals, including the *Pioneer*, the *Crisis*, and the *New Moral World*. Each of these journals was widely read, and their reach was enhanced by the practice of reading articles aloud in Owenite meetings. The *New Moral World* (1834-45) had emerged from the *Crisis* (1832-4) when it closed, and was the most popular Owenite journal over its eleven-year existence, with an estimated weekly circulation of around 40,000 at its peak (c.1839-1841).[28] The *Pioneer* (1833-4) was, according to Barbara Taylor, the 'second most widely-read working-class newspaper of the period (behind *The Poor Man's Guardian*), with a circulation of 20-30,000 copies, and a readership around ten times this size'.[29] Each of these journals offered space for reports from local branches about their ideas and activities, and printed significant numbers of letters. They welcomed discussions, offering a vibrant site for the negotiation of the Owenite ideology, and were both influential in shaping, and reflective of, the arguments and self-understandings of Owenites. Further, in printing reports of activities and accounts of lectures from the regionally-

[25] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 228.
[26] Pankhurst, *William Thompson*; Rose, 'John Finch'; Salt, 'Isaac Ironside and the Hollow Meadows Farm Experiment'.
[27] Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette*, 212.
[28] Claeys, *Owen, Robert (1771–1858), Socialist and Philanthropist.*
[29] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 97. As the official newspaper of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, the *Pioneer* also offers an important insight into the movement during its trade unionist phase.

dispersed branches, they created the common sense of a shared project and identity. Outside of Robert Owen's control for much of their life, they also avoided some of the endless recapitulation of Owen's central preoccupations, and manifested the creativity, as well as the tensions, within the movement.

These journals were an important ingredient in the movement's vibrant community life, enabling communication and granting publicity for events which attracted members and nurtured bonds of solidarity. Owenites established social institutions and 'Halls of Science', the first of which was opened at Sheffield in March 1839, to host recreational social gatherings and educational lectures. They organised communal activities as both group bonding and political education, encouraging and enacting solidarity by sharing food together on outings.[30] Socialism was not merely a distant goal, but a philosophy of how to live in the present, with the claim that individuals were not responsible for the formation of their own characters requiring that Owenites acted towards others with compassion and charity. Singing Owenite hymns together and gathering for reading groups helped to cultivate a sense of community, instantiating the benevolence and mutuality which were central to the Owenite ethos. Local branches hosted festivals on Christmas Day and Easter, and they celebrated rites of passage with their own baptism, marriage, and funeral ceremonies.[31]

In addition to its communities, co-operative stores, labour exchanges, journals, and vibrant branch life, Owenite socialism also enjoyed a brief trade unionist incarnation. The Owenite-backed Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union attracted half a million members in the weeks following its founding in April 1833, although this rapid growth left the union 'as unwieldy as its name'.[32] The Union failed to gain significant support outside of London and folded by winter 1834, but its influence endured.[33] Forms of mass labour organisation had long preceded the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, but its novelty lay in seeking to establish alliances between labourers in different trades. Prior to this, labour organisation had tended to be 'vertical', with stratification according to one's trade (e.g. tailors or shipwrights), rather than 'horizontal', which established boundaries between employers

[30] Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"', 22.
[31] For more on the culture of Owenite branch life, see Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture'.
[32] Trade Union Congress, *A Short History of British Trade Unionism*, 11.
[33] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 196; Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 31; Siméon, 'The Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, 1833-1834', 24–26.

and wage-earners.[34] Advocates for the Union also offered a vision of a decentralised, socialist economy in which trade unions would each own and control a different trade.[35] This conception of trade unions not as instruments for collective bargaining but as participants in social transformation and in economic governance led George Lichtheim to describe the Grand National as anticipating 'both syndicalism and what was later called "guild socialism"'.[36]

Following the failure of the Labour Exchanges and the GNCTU in 1834, a new national organisation, the Association of All Classes of All Nations (AACAN), was founded in 1835. This was then to merge with the National Community Friendly Society (NCFS - founded in 1837) in May 1839 to form the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists (officially referred to as the 'Rational Society' from 1842). Despite the flurry of initialisms, there was often significant continuity of personnel and purpose between these organisations, which determined the movement's strategy and coordinated branch activities, focusing at different times on political education or on identifying a suitable site of a community. The 1845 decision to disband Queenwood effectively brought an end to the Rational Society. Amid improving social conditions and calmed economic volatility, and with internal dissention and the exhaustion of energies after their failure of their foremost experiment, the organised Owenite movement dissolved, leaving a 'deep financial as well as a psychological crisis for the socialist movement'.[37]

However, the influence of Owenite socialism outlasted the institutions of the organised movement. Former Owenites would contribute to a series of radical and progressive campaigns over the succeeding decades, carrying with them the ideas and skills learned in the socialist movement. G.J.

[34] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 265. The shift is captured in the now archaic distinction between a *trade* union, which was the organisation of a single trade, and a *trades* union, which was a horizontal combination of different trades.
[35] Thompson, 'Senex's Letters on Associated Labour', 21;16.
[36] Lichtheim, *The Origins of Socialism*, 115. Guild socialism was a movement which blossomed briefly in the inter-war period and sought to establish self-governing industry-specific guilds as the means for workers to gain social and economic power. Guild socialists were concerned with the alienating consequences of capitalist wage labour but suspicious of the consolidation of power in the state as the solution. They argued for the extension of democratic control beyond 'some special sphere of social action known as "politics"...to any and every form of social action, in especial, to industrial and economic fully as much to political affairs'. Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-Stated*, 12. As a result, they were deeply critical of the Labour Party's over-estimation of the transformative potential of parliamentary success, and advocated instead for workers' control of social and economic processes through self-governing industry-specific guilds. Wright, 'Guild Socialism Revisited', 171.
[37] Fraser, *Alexander Campbell and the Search for Socialism*, 110.

Holyoake was an important figure in trade union and co-operative movements for the remainder of the century, writing the first seminal history of the co-operative movement. John Weston was a founder member of the First International Working Men's Association (the 'First International').[38] John Watts continued to advocate for the extension of education, helping to establish schools and libraries in Manchester, and he was a major contributor to later newspapers such as the *Co-operative News*.[39] Abel Heywood, who had been a prominent Owenite publisher, would twice become Mayor of Manchester (in 1862-3 and 1876-7) and was largely responsible for the construction of the city's grand Town Hall.[40] John Francis Bray returned to the United States, where he had been born, and joined the Knights of Labor; only a factional dispute prevented him being nominated by the Greenback Labor Party as their candidate for the Presidency in 1880.[41] Among the 'Rochdale Pioneers' were James Daly and John Garside, who had each served as secretary for the Rochdale branch of the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists, and John Garside and George Healey, who each donated to the community at Queenwood.[42]

Economists linked to Owenism, including John Francis Bray and William Thompson, formulated a novel and influential critique of classical political economy, challenging its neglect of questions of distribution, exclusion of ethical considerations, and failure to recognise the facts of economic crisis.[43] In virtue of this economic critique, Anton Menger anointed William Thompson as the 'the most eminent founder of scientific socialism', with a 'train of thought, and even [a] mode of expression which reappear later on in the works of so many other Socialists, especially Marx and Rodbertus'.[44] Harold Laski argued that Thompson was one of the 'men who laid the foundations' which Marx and Engels 'brought so remarkably to completion'.[45] Gregory Claeys has also identified the influence of Owenites upon Marx and Engels. Claeys argues that, in writing his *Umrisse*, 'Engels took many of his most striking early arguments from [Owenite John] Watts', and in turn Engels' text 'assisted in leading

[38] Bensimon, 'The IWMA and Its Precursors in London, c. 1830–1860', 34–35.
[39] Saville, 'John Watts (1818-87)'.
[40] Williams, *Abel Heywood, the Man Who Built the Town Hall*.
[41] Jolliffe, 'John Francis Bray'.
[42] Purvis, 'Rochdale Pioneers'.
[43] Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism*; Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*; Foxwell, 'Introduction'; Thompson, *The People's Science*.
[44] Menger, *The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour*, 101–2.
[45] Laski, 'Introduction', 56.

Marx himself more deeply into such an engagement [with classical political economy]'.[46] This influence is such, Claeys maintains, that the study of Owenism can clarify Marx and Engels' thought on the withering of the state, on the specialisation of labour, and on historical materialism, and can provide an insight into the origins of the inadequate Marxian account of politics.[47]

Owenites have also been recognised for their contribution to early feminism. Several women, including Emma Martin and Margaret Chappellsmith, were employed as 'social missionaries', travelling the country to lecture and participate in debates. Opportunities were granted to women like Frances Morrison or Ernestine Rose to write articles and deliver lectures on the gendered inequalities of marriage or the social harm caused by the limits placed upon women's educational opportunities.[48] It was Owenites Anna Doyle Wheeler and William Thompson who wrote one of the 'first texts in history that explicitly advocate female suffrage', their *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race* (1825).[49] Owenite ideas were particularly fertile for feminist theory. The socialist account of character formation proved that female inferiority was a remediable product of an unjust social order. This unjust order had stymied the development and corrupted the character not only of women, but also of men, and change would benefit all. Further, Owenite feminists argued, the only viable solution was a socialist one. Female dependency and oppression could be ended only with the abolition of private property and with the transformation of a nuclear family which enabled male domination and nurtured selfish, competitive attitudes. Legal reform was insufficient; emancipation required wholesale social transformation, including the establishment of intentional communities and the cultivation of an ethos of cooperation.[50] On Barbara Taylor's account, it was with the demise of Owenism that these socialist and feminist strands, which linked economic and women's oppression, came to be decoupled.[51] Yet, the extent and depth of commitment to feminist ideas in the movement should not be exaggerated.

[46] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 167.
[47] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 7–14; 51; Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 167, 181–83; Claeys, 'Early Socialism as Intellectual History', 896.
[48] Anderson, *Joyous Greetings*, 51.
[49] Siméon, "'Goddess of Reason'".
[50] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*.
[51] Taylor, 263.

Despite the egalitarian rhetoric, women were largely absent from executive positions in Owenite organisations and were reliably allocated traditionally-gendered, inferior roles in communities.[52]

The influence of the movement is also reflected in their contribution of some novel terms to the political lexicon, including 'individualism', 'social science', and they were the first group to identify themselves as 'socialists'.[53] However, Owenites are still most famous as 'critical-utopian' or 'utopian' socialists, a label conferred upon them first in the *Communist Manifesto* and subsequently in Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.[54] This characterisation awkwardly gathered Owen alongside Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon, ignoring their significant differences in order to emphasise their shared failure to approach a Marxian 'scientific' socialism. Even in contemporary, non-Marxist scholarship today, Owen and the Owenites are frequently still labelled alongside Fourier and Saint-Simon as 'utopian socialists'.[55] This characterisation is unhelpful for three reasons. First, when Owenites were described as 'utopian', it was in virtue of their failure to grasp how socialism was already gestating within capitalism, and to understand that the convulsive transition to socialism would require the participation of the proletariat. Yet, others seemingly denominate Owenites as 'utopians' because they were unduly optimistic about the means or end of social change.[56] Such conceptual unclarity about what the adjective 'utopian' is intended to convey is confusing and misleading. Second, the enduring characterisation of Owenites as 'utopian' socialists occludes the pragmatic and practical elements of the movement, such as the establishment of trade unions or co-operative stores.[57] Third, because 'utopian' socialism was contrasted against 'scientific' Marxian socialism, such a description obscures the centrality of science for Owenite socialists. Owenites argued that social science provided

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[52] Kolmerton, 'Egalitarian Promises and Inegalitarian Practices'; Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 219–22.

[53] Claeys, "'Individualism,' 'Socialism,' and 'Social Science'". The first manuscript usage of the word 'socialist' occurs in a November 1822 letter from Edward Cowper to Robert Owen, in which Cowper observes observes that 'Mrs. Johns...seems well adapted to become what my friend Jo. Applegath calls a Socialist'. 'Jo. Applegath' is likely Cowper's brother-in-law Joseph Applegath. *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 955. The first occurrence of the word 'socialist' in print is found in the *London Co-operative Magazine* five years later. *London Co-operative Magazine*, 2, no. 11 (November 1827).

[54] Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party'; Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

[55] See, for example, Beecher, 'Early European Socialism'; Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists*. Charles Fourier did take a brief interest in Owen's work at New Lanark in 1822-23, an interest which Owen did not reciprocate. Fourier soon came to dismiss Owen as a mere 'moralist', and although they did meet when Owen visited Paris in July 1837, the language barrier was insurmountable. See Bouchet, 'A Transient Allergy'.

[56] When Barbara Taylor describes Owenism's 'utopian strategy', or W.H.G. Armytage describes Owen as a 'Utopist', it is not in this sense. See Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 142; Armytage, *Heavens Below*, 141.

[57] J.F.C. Harrison makes the same complaint about the use of the label. Harrison, 'A New View of Mr Owen', 3.

the means to transform human character and renew society, and that natural science enabled the creation of a more productive world.[58] Many Owenites understood the latest scientific advances to confirm the truth of socialism, with Raspail's organic chemistry verifying the Owenite account of character formation and the latest advances in biology confirming the greater efficiency of cooperation.[59] Owenite Halls of Science often hosted popular lectures on geology or chemistry, and journals enthused about new methods for melting iron, cures for consumption, and ways to identify edible plants.[60]

The relationship between Owen and the Owenites was not always straightforward. It was described by R.H. Tawney as a 'blend of adoration on one side, sympathy on the other, and cross purposes…on both', but it was also marked by significant tensions.[61] There was even disagreement as to whether the socialists wanted to be identified as 'Owenites' at all. One author in the New Moral World diplomatically noted that while it was flattering to share 'the name of the distinguished individual whose principles we love', it foreclosed the possibility that they might continue to improve and develop the ideas of socialism.[62] Nonetheless, 'Owenite' continued to be used interchangeably with 'socialist'. Tensions arose over Owen's financial mismanagement, which led to his removal as Governor of Queenwood in 1844, but his imprudent spending was itself reflective of his vision of social transformation. While Owen assumed that benevolent capitalists would quickly flock to finance his communities, many Owenites were more sceptical about the class who employed them and assumed that money would have to be raised gradually from the working classes. There were also disagreements about whether Owenite organisations and future communities should be democratic, and about whether democratic participation could help to bring about social change.[63] Although Owen

[58] Leopold, 'Scientific Socialism'.
[59] *Crisis* no. 4, 10, 'The Truth of Robert Owen's Doctrine…' – Verax (14 June 1834), 78-80; Desmond, 'Artisan Resistance and Evolution in Britain', 93.
[60] *Crisis* no. 1, 40, 'Scientific Lectures' (8 December 1832), 159; *Crisis* no. 2, 26, 'Iron Houses' (6 July 1833), 206; *The Co-operative Miscellany* no.1, 1, 'Cure for Consumption' (January 1830), 19; *The Social Pioneer* no. 2 'The Scarlet Runner' (16 March 1839), 15.
[61] Tawney, 'Robert Owen', 37–38.
[62] *NMW* no. 3, 125, 'Our Name' (18 March 1837), 161-2.
[63] Butt, 'Introduction'; Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 72–74; Leopold, 'Scientific Socialism'; Miliband, 'The Politics of Robert Owen'; Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites'. This included disputes in the GNCTU as to whether the Union should represent all classes, including employers, and as to whether confrontational strikes were a legitimate means of pursuing social change. See Siméon, 'The Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, 1833-1834', 26–27.

eventually came to support the Chartist agitation for the extension of the franchise, it was only after decades of recalcitrance which stoked tension with the numerous Owenites who were involved in agitation for political reform.[64] Each of these disputes, over financial management, internal governance, and support for reform, embody a more basic conflict between the 'more Utopian, quasi-millenarian perfectionism of Owen himself' and 'the more traditional democratic conceptions of some of his followers'.[65] Unfortunately, other philosophical disputes between Owen and Owenites have been misattributed to the pragmatic indifference of socialist propagandists in 'theoretical consistency'.[66]

1.2 Thesis Structure

This thesis will be concerned with a different question, one which has divided scholars of the movement. This is the question of the relationship between Owenite socialists and religion. Historians have noted that Owenites adopted the traditional trappings of a religion, including social 'missionaries', 'social hymns', or a new 'bible', and appealed to the new 'millennium'. Yet, they were also notorious among contemporaries as 'infidels' and many Owenites followed Owen in venturing fervent attacks upon, in Robert Owen's words, 'the errors - gross errors - that have been combined with the fundamental notions of every religion that has hitherto been taught to men'.[67] Historians have argued that the Owenites were themselves a 'millenarian sect' or that they were promoting 'a kind of secular religion'.[68] Or that, in fact they were merely advertising a 'secular morality which was construed as "religious" primarily insofar as this was an effective means of drawing away adherents from the various Christian churches'.[69] That their adoption of religious language was merely metaphorical, expressing

[64] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 92; Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites'. According to John Butt, 'Owen's anti-radicalism can be traced back at least to his signing of a Unitarian message of loyalty to the Crown in 1793 during the anti-Jacobin outrages. To the end of his days there was little sign of change'. Butt, 'Introduction', 13.
[65] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 19.
[66] Ashcraft, 'Liberal Political Theory and Working-Class Radicalism', 265–66.
[67] Owen, *A New View of Society and Other Writings*, 199.
[68] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*; Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 135; Lineham, 'Christian Minorities', 565.
[69] Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"', 25. See also Prothero, *Artisans & Politics*, 263.

'an intensity of aspiration for which there was simply no secular vocabulary available'.[70] In this thesis I will seek to untangle and disambiguate some of these accounts of the relationship between Owenite socialism and religion. I will then identify how Owenites offer a re-conception of the nature of 'religion' as advanced through knowledge of the natural and social world, as a prospective source of solidarity which could serve as the unifying bond for communities, and as constituted by ethical conduct. I will demonstrate how their critique of contemporary religion was shaped by the particular conditions of the early nineteenth century, conditions which represented a problem to which they offered a solution. I then show how this solution was formed by drawing upon the traditions of natural theology, popular religion, deism, and Rational Dissent. I show how this solution was formed through a sincere and considered reflection upon the problem of religious truth. I will then show the importance of this reimagination of religion to their understanding of socialism. I demonstrate that Owenites understood their socialism to be, in part, a project of religious reform, as rivalling the Oxford Movement and as a successor to the Reformation. Their religious interests were not an eccentric adornment to their socialism, an outdated residue yet to be shed and encumbering the development of a mature socialism, or merely instrumental to their temporal goals. Instead, their ambitions of religious reform were grounded in the philosophical preoccupations which animated their socialism. They conceived theological falsehoods as an obstacle to the triumph of socialism. And they argued that one should become a socialist, in part, precisely because it created the conditions for the popularisation of religious virtue.

This thesis demonstrates the centrality of a critique of existing religions and the importance of the Owenite 'rational religion' to their conception of socialism. I show how this 'rational religion' can be understood only as emerging as a response to the challenges and as drawing upon the religious resources of the early nineteenth century. Owenite interests in the transformation of religion were fundamental to their socialism: philosophically grounded, necessary for the cultivation of mutualism and solidarity, and an important reason to become a socialist.

[70] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 160.

Chapter 2: The State of the Literature

In Chapter 2, I explore interpretations of the relationship between Owenite socialism and religion, interpretations which differ in their understanding of both the *nature* and the *importance* of this relationship. Some scholars have argued that Owenites were determinedly anti-religious, that they conferred central importance on a critique of religion as erroneous and pernicious, and in so doing they contributed to the development of Secularism from the 'infidel' tradition of Thomas Paine or Richard Carlile.[71] Others argue that Christian Owenites were 'a significant proportion of Owen's supporters', and that these Christian Owenites scoured scripture to find justifications for the Owenite account of character formation, identifying evidence of its truth in the Lord's Prayer's plea that one not be 'led into temptation'.[72] Such was the influence of these Christian Owenites that, on one account, the *Pioneer*, among the most prominent Owenite journals, 'might almost, in a sense, be called a Christian Socialist paper'.[73] Other accounts emphasise that Owenites were indebted to Christianity in different ways and with different implications. Some suggest that the Owenite strategy of achieving change through the establishment of communities was itself borrowed from the Protestant communalism of the Moravians, Harmonists, or Shakers. Others emphasise the dependence of Owenites upon a framework of Christian millennialism, whether because of their experience of the social dislocation of early industrialism, because they lacked other ways to articulate their optimism about the prospect of radical change, or conversely because of the absence of available means to achieve their ends.[74] Or focus is trained upon the Owenites as akin to a 'sect' who responded to their failures of the early 1830s by abandoning activity which directly pursued social change and sought instead to retreat from a corrupting world.[75] Others note the Owenite advertisement of a novel 'rational religion', although often this is translated into an appeal for a richer morality, attributed to an attempt to compete upon conventionally religious terrain, or analogised to subsequent 'secular religions such as Comte's Religion of Humanity. Or they identify Owenites as themselves declaring

[71] Frow and Frow, *The New Moral World*; Royle, *Radical Politics*; Royle, *Victorian Infidels*.
[72] Lockley, 'Christian Doubt and Hope in Early Socialism', 373.
[73] Binyon, *The Christian Socialist Movement in England*, 43.
[74] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 100–104; Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 160; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.
[75] Taylor, 'Explaining the Origins of Socialism', 396; Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 87–106.

socialism to be a 'new humanist religion', with its own social 'hymns', social 'missionaries' and with a *Book of the New Moral World* which functioned as 'a sort of sacred text for the Owenites'.[76]

As the variety of these accounts suggests, the nature and importance of the Owenite relationship with religion has been a subject of significant disagreement. In some instances that disagreement is a direct and clear incompatibility. In others, it is a more diffuse difference about the significance of a particular influence or the meaning of a practice. The goal of this chapter is to prepare the ground for the argument of Chapters 3 and 4, which will demonstrate the nature and importance of a particular engagement with religion to the thought and action of Owenite socialists. This chapter will prepare the ground in that it will lay out how scholars have understood this engagement. I will also venture criticisms of these accounts where those accounts have misconceived or exaggerated the importance of a particular facet of the movement. In some cases, those accounts directly conflict with the interpretation which I offer in this thesis, and therefore the criticisms which I offer are helpful to my own interpretation in that they serve to weaken rival accounts. In other cases, those accounts are compatible with my own interpretation, and so those criticisms stand independently.

In Chapter 2, I note how the movement embraced individuals with a variety of doctrinal commitments, including atheists, orthodox Anglicans, Dissenters, and those involved in forms of millennialism or ecstatic religion (Section 2.1.1).

Then I discuss presentations of Owenites as anti-religious (Section 2.1.2). On these accounts, Owenites participated in a tradition stretching backwards to the 'infidelity' of Richard Carlile and onwards to G.J. Holyoake's Secularism. I describe how contentious debates between socialists and anti-socialist Christians were useful to both sides as a source of publicity and revenue, and argue that the philosophical controversies at stake were not conflicts between Owenism and 'Christianity' as such. I also argue that accounts of Owenism as essentially hostile to religion lean too heavily upon Charles Southwell, whose commitment to socialism was ambivalent, and too heavily upon the

[76] Stedman Jones, 'Utopian Socialism Reconsidered', 142; Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen*, 48.

relationship with later Secularism, which was a function of Holyoake's political entrepreneurship more than a reflection of something fundamental about Owenism.

Then I note that Owenites have been understood as borrowing language, practices, and structures of thought from contemporary Christians (Section 2.1.3). I describe how a recognition that Owenites sang 'hymns' and included social 'missionaries', conceals disagreement about *why* they did so. I then focus attention upon three traditions of religious thought and action which have been suggested as influencing Owenite socialism. First, Owenites have been described as inhabiting a tradition of millennialism. I argue that such descriptions are unhelpful because of the complexity of the concept, because the concept is freighted with implications about psychological distress, and because a narrow focus upon millennialism leaves an impression that religious influences obstructed mature, reasoned engagement in politics. Second, Owenites have been described as being, or being like, a 'sect'. I also raise doubts about this characterisation, which implies disparate claims about the organisation's activities, ultimate goals, ethos, and the factors which explain these features, and encourages misleading inferences about the relationship between these dimensions of the movement. Third, Owenites have interpreted as inheriting a tradition of Protestant communalism.

Next, I describe how the Owenite attempt to establish a 'rational religion' has been interpreted (Section 2.1.4). I note how interpretations have tended to translate this 'rational religion' into terms which are both more secular and more reassuringly socialist. Such interpretations maintain that the rational religion is *really* about morality, explain the rational religion as having the form of a religion only because socialists were competing on traditionally religious terrain to claim moral and epistemic authority, or offer misleading analogies to 'secular religions' such as Comte's 'Religion of Humanity'.

In Section 2.2, I show how interpretations of Owenites as the first socialists or trade unionists have tended to occlude the Owenite interest in religious questions because subsequent socialism and trade unionism are often associated with an indifference or hostility to religion. There are two ways in which this leads to a neglect of religious questions within Owenite socialism. The first is that scholars of Owenism have been motivated by the search to discover the origins of subsequent socialism. The second is that later socialists have sought legitimation by claiming Owenites as their own antecedents.

Chapter 3: Reconceiving Religion

The second chapter outlined some conflicting accounts of the relationship between Owenite socialism and religion, and this third chapter will show that many of these conflicts can be reconciled. They can be reconciled by recognising how several accounts each offer a partial perspective upon the Owenite engagement with religion. I will demonstrate this by describing one Owenite re-imagination of the concept of religion, which will explain how Owenites could be regarded as pursuing a religious project, while rejecting contemporary religious institutions and being perceived by contemporaries as secular or irreligious. On this understanding, religion is both socially valuable and intimately tied to the philosophy and practice of the Owenite movement.

I will first describe the nature and purpose of conceptual change, before identifying one particular Owenite engagement with 'religion'. I emphasise that this engagement with 'religion' rather than, for example, 'Christianity', involves a reflection upon religion's essential nature and upon its role in the coming of the socialist future. I describe three features of this Owenite account of the concept of 'religion'. The first identifies an association between religion and knowledge of the natural and social world. It is argued, variously, that the religious instinct grounds the desire to learn about the world, thereby motivating the advancement of knowledge. Or that religion is rooted in the existing state of scientific knowledge and progresses alongside it. These accounts of religion as tied to the increasing knowledge of the world both attribute particular importance to religion and connect it to the socialist enterprise. Education was central to Owenite culture and philosophy, and the popularisation of natural and 'social' science (the Owenite account of character formation) was understood to be an important mechanism to create socialist subjects. In this way, Owenite educational activities, in virtue of the way that they extended knowledge of the world, expressed the religious impulse. A second feature concerns religion as a prospective source of solidarity, which could serve as the unifying bond for communities. The Owenite model of social transformation envisaged the establishment of a network of communities, each including several thousand people, in which members would produce and consume collectively. It was recognised, however, that the success of such communities was contingent upon the egotism and prejudice of the old immoral world being replaced by mutuality and solidarity. An

account of religion as a source of such attitudes and motivations is therefore one which endows religion with significant importance. A third feature of this Owenite account understands ethical conduct as the pure, rational core of religion, a core which is shared between contemporary incarnations of religion and is definitive of religion as such. Such a conception of religion as a matter of acting morally has wider implications. It suggests that religious virtue is manifested not through prayer or ceremonial rites but by acting well towards others. And if there is a common morality at the rational heart of all religions, then this indicates how denominational boundaries might be dissolved and an obstacle to social harmony removed.

Recognising this Owenite account of religion as linked to the advancement of knowledge and as manifest in social relations suggests a possible reconciliation of some of the conflicting interpretations described in the first chapter. These interpretations included the claims that Owenite socialism was itself a religion, or a substitute for religion, or had a religious quality. And the claims that Owenite socialism was implacably irreligious, atheistic, or hostile to the Church, and that the existence of religious forms of expression was merely strategic or rhetorical. In 1835, the *New Moral World* became '*The New Moral World, or Millennium'*, and it was explained that this eponymous millennium would 'be attained by the agency of man [and would be, in virtue of this, no]…less the work of that Power, which "directs the atom, and controls the aggregate of nature"'.[77] One might argue that this reflects a secularised conception of the millennium, an available metaphor which could be used to describe any dramatic change.[78] However, I argue that this use of millennialist language is rooted in an Owenite account of religion as expressed through temporal works and entwined with human action. This is an account which identifies socialist philosophy and practice, in virtue of its promoting human welfare and knowledge of Owenite social science, as itself encouraging the progression of religion. It then becomes easier to understand why Owenites present themselves as following religious imperatives, and have therefore been perceived to manifest a 'quasi-religious' devotion to socialism. Because religion was expressed through ethical action and in furthering understanding of the world, it was therefore tied to the progress of socialism. Religious language, such as the declaration of the

[77] *NMW* no.2, 55 'The Millennium' (14 November 1835), 20-1.
[78] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*.

millennium, is not being used metaphorically or to express emotional investment, but rather is explained by this Owenite conception of the nature of religion. At the same time, however, it is easy to see why the emphasis upon temporal action rather than traditional forms of religious expression such as ceremonial worship or prayer might be (I argue, incorrectly) perceived as promoting secularism. And also why many Owenites might have been perceived to be fiercely anti-religious. The Owenite account of religion described in the previous chapter was one which rejected the role of a professional clergy and was repelled by the mystifications of a social elite. Further, it was an account attached to the advancement of science, an advancement which the Church was perceived to obstruct, with its persecutions of Galileo and promotion of an inaccurate account of human character.[79] Such Owenite opposition to the Church can itself be understood as grounded in a distinctive understanding of religion. Understanding this Owenite conception of religion offers an opportunity to reconcile these accounts of Owenites as performing a divine role, pursuing secularisation, and rejecting contemporary religion.

Chapter 4: Owenite Socialism in Religious Context

In Chapter 4, I identify some key features of the religious world which Owenites encountered, which shaped their views, which they critiqued, and from which they borrowed. This chapter will perform two functions. The first function is to identify those features of the religious context against which Owenites were reacting: the dominant theology, the activities of religious institutions, and the existence of denominational division and antipathy. The second function is to identify some sources of the Owenite account of religion, locating the materials which Owenites were using in constructing their own response to the challenges which they understood themselves to face.

The first function is to examine the nature of the challenges which Owenites encountered in their religious context, which provoked their critical reflection on the nature of religion and demanded their proposed solution. Political thought follows the logic of question and answer, with any argument or theory always a response to a perceived problem or challenge. This chapter seeks to become clearer

[79] *NMW* no.6, 48 'Socialism as it Should be Advocated' - S.N. (21 September 1839), 755-7.

about the question to which the Owenite rational religion was an answer. This involves investigating the ways in which religion was perceived to be damaging or inadequate and exploring why Owenites thought in the way that they did about the influence of religion upon the world which they encountered. Such a focus upon the nature of the context which they experienced also brings to light the specificity of this context, the fact that it was a particular religious climate in which Owenite socialism was formed, and to which they responded. Many of the challenges which they encountered and problems which they perceived were not the product of religion or Christianity as such, but instead were reflective of the contingent facts of their own moment. Owenites responded to a culturally pervasive theological orthodoxy, against a moment of incendiary religious division, and against religious institutions which were perceived to marshal scriptural resources against social change. Each of these features provoked socialist critique. They also provided the challenges to which the Owenite account of rational religion was a response, and suggested some desiderata for an adequate solution. These were the problems which Owenites sought to solve, which motivated their account of rational religion, and against which any solution had to be measured and evaluated. The nature of such problems implied the contours of an appropriate solution.

The second function of this chapter is to identify the sources upon which Owenites drew in constructing their response to the challenges they faced. Recognising these sources allows one to recognise both the continuity and novelty of ideas and arguments, to understand when Owenites were following existing conventions of argument, when they were re-stating widely-shared beliefs, and when they were defying those conventions and rejecting such beliefs. It also allows one to better understand how these socialists came to think in the way that they did. Importantly, these sources were drawn from within theological debates, from ongoing conversations about the nature of religion. These debates were not concerned with reducing the salience or circumscribing the relevance of religion, but rather with creating a more appropriate and truer form of religion. In borrowing from these sources and participating in these debates, Owenites were working within an existing religious framework, adopting the available vocabulary and assumptions.

It is the primary argument of this chapter that the Owenite enterprise should not be seen as either anti-religious or secularising. I emphasise that the hostility expressed towards Christianity or religion

was a response to particular features of a distinctive context. I show that the challenges and problems which they diagnosed in this context, such as the rancorous disagreement, rancorous division or punitive theological tone, found their solution not in curtailing the influence of religion, but in finding a truer account of religion. That is, while they identified a set of challenges which were posed by the dominant religious institutions and theological ideas, they also argued that these challenges would find their solution with a fuller understanding of the nature of religion. In searching for this solution, they drew upon existing theological debates and many ideas which were firmly within the mainstream of Christian thought. Their rational religion was not an attempt to abolish, delimit, or diminish religion, but instead drew upon existing theological currents in the pursuit of a truer, socialist form of religion. It was not motivated by political or narrowly instrumental concerns, by a desire to use religion for other ends, but by a perceived need to address a particular religious problem. The Owenite rational religion was a solution which can be understood only as a response to the challenges presented by a particular religious context and only as rooted within existing theological debates. This context and these debates have not been adequately recognised in accounts of the emergence of socialism, which focus upon the rise of industrial capitalism, the concentration of labour in new urban settings, or intensifying exploitation. This was the theological context of the birth of socialism, which posed problems to which they responded and provided the resources from which they constructed their solutions.

Chapter 5: Owenite Religion as a Socialist Religion

In Chapter 5, I present three scholarly accounts of religious interests as unimportant to socialism or as un-socialist. I then reject these accounts, showing instead that Owenites understood themselves to be undertaking a project of religious reform which was grounded in their socialism and essential to the achievement of their goals. First, I note three ways in which scholars have understood the relationship between Owenite socialism and religious interests or influences: i) that the pursuit of religious interests reflects a form of eccentricity, an abandonment of socialism (Section 5.1.1), ii) that religious influences offer an archaic encumbrance to the development of mature socialism (Section

5.1.2), and iii) that religious interests are merely instrumental, explained by the need to demystify an ideological illusion or to reassure former believers (Section 5.1.3).

In the remainder of this chapter, I show that these accounts misunderstand the centrality of religious change to socialism. In Section 5.2, I describe how Owenites understand their socialism as a project of religious reform. In describing the change which socialism would bring, Owenites often turn to examples of religious reform. They select such examples to illustrate the process by which change would occur or the nature of that change. Or in order to demonstrate the social changes which created opportunities for the emergence of socialism or reflected the increasing prospects of the establishment of socialism. Events such as the reorganisation of religious institutions or the advance of toleration or intensification of religious unrest are reported with excitement as demonstrating the fertility of the moment for socialism. Or instances of religious reform are selected as exemplifying the kind of change which socialism would bring. I describe, in particular, how the Reformation is adopted as illustrating the possibility of socialism and as furnishing a model for the change to be pursued by socialists. In situating themselves as inheriting and renewing the Reformation, Owenites imply their understanding of the kind of project in which they were engaged, their conception of the means and end of socialism. The selection of such events illustrates how many Owenites understood themselves to be participants in an ongoing process of religious reform, a process reflected in contemporary events and advanced by historical events such as the Reformation. Further, their identification of the rivals to socialism reflects their recognition of the other contending accounts of how social distress will be repaired and of the other movements competing for prospective adherents. In identifying these rivals, they regard the repeal of the Corn Laws as equivalent to the attempts of the Quakers; each represents an attempt to address social problems, and each represents a rival to socialism.

In Section 5.4, I demonstrate how the Owenite critique of religion was grounded in socialist reasons. It therefore cannot be detached from the other activities of the movement, whether as an eccentric distraction or as merely instrumental. Instead, Owenites bring to bear consistent considerations on their understanding of religion. It is this which shows that they are offering a *socialist* account of religion. This contrasts with the scholarly interpretations described in Section 5.1 of the Owenite engagement with religion as eccentric, as the residuum of a previous tradition, or as merely

instrumental to their true goals. Further, I show how false theology offers an obstacle to socialism because it encourages rancorous divisions which prevent the recognition of common humanity and the promotion of social solidarity. The successful operation of socialist communities depends upon the establishment of the true religion. Finally, I note how socialism enables the victory of true religion by providing the preconditions for the widespread practice of religious virtue. This further demonstrates the centrality of religious reform to the establishment of socialism, by showing how the increasing dissemination of religious virtue was understood as a key attraction of the socialist future.

Chapter 6: Religion and the History of Socialism

In Chapter 6, I examine the relationship between socialism and religion more broadly. 'Socialism' describes a rich and diverse tradition of thought and action, so it is implausible to suggest that there is a *single* relationship between socialism and religion. Instead, the goal of this section is to distinguish some different ways of thinking about this relationship. I note eight senses in which one might understand the relationship between socialism and religion: that socialism i) is philosophically opposed to religion, ii) is neutral on religious questions, iii) shares features with religion in virtue of the way in which socialists relate to their commitments or iv) in virtue of the way in which socialist organisations adopt customarily religious practices, that v) socialism is itself a religion or vi) a replacement for religion, that vii) socialism requires the establishment of a novel religion, and finally viii) that socialism is itself grounded in certain theological traditions.

As well as clarifying an ongoing debate about socialism and religion, this chapter also seeks to set the discussion of the previous chapters into a broader philosophical and intellectual context. This aids reflection on how discussion of Owenism might contribute to broader debates about socialism and religion, particularly in virtue of the depth of Owenite reflection upon the role of religion in socialism. It allows one to think about how re-consideration of Owenism might contribute to broader understanding of the history and philosophy of socialism.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the Chapter 7, I describe some implications to be drawn from this thesis. First, about the relationship between religion and politics (Section 7.1). Second, about the practice of the history of political thought (Section 7.2). Third, about Owenism's influence upon subsequent socialism (Section 7.3). Fourth, about the history of socialism more broadly (Section 7.4). Finally, I suggest some lessons which contemporary socialists might draw from the example of Owenite socialism (Section 7.5).

1.3 Early Nineteenth-Century Britain

In Section 1.3 of this Introduction, I briefly note some salient political, economic, and cultural features of the context which Owenite socialists faced. Early nineteenth-century Britain was marked by economic volatility and political unrest. The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 saw rising unemployment, with demobilised soldiers and reduced demand as the economy returned to a peacetime footing. This was then followed by an economic boom between 1820 and 1825, and then a dramatic crash which brought riots in Lancashire's manufacturing districts. Fears of disorder were also provoked by the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, where a meeting in support of extended political representation was met with repression, and the 1820 Cato Street Conspiracy, a failed attempt to assassinate the Cabinet which was likely encouraged by government spies. As a response to this perceived danger, the government pursued a course of repression, introducing the 'Six Acts', which restricted rights of assembly, toughened sentences for seditious libel, and increased taxes on newspapers. Overt political radicalism waned until the end of the 1820s, when a new period of political instability and crisis began. Apocalyptic fears were provoked by an outbreak of cholera in 1832, an event which was widely interpreted as bearing providential meaning. Acrimonious debates arose over the removal of restrictions on Catholics with Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the extension of the franchise in the Reform Crisis in 1832, and the increasing harshness of welfare provision of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. Fierce division also surrounded the 'War of the Unstamped', a successful campaign to reduce the taxes levied on pamphlets and newspapers.[80] In the two years after the stamp

[80] Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-44*.

tax was reduced in 1836, annual sales of newspapers doubled from 25.5 million to over 53 million.[81] Discontent emerged with riots in Birmingham in July 1839 and a failed uprising in Newport in November 1839, which were met with renewed repression and arrests.[82] Declining economic conditions were such that the early 1840s were known as the 'Hungry Forties', and 1842 saw a 'General Strike' which involved half a million labourers, 'the most massive industrial action to take place in Britain — and probably anywhere — in the nineteenth century'.[83] Sometimes known as the 'Plug Riots' because some strikers removed the boiler plugs from steam engines to halt work, the Strike started in Staffordshire before spreading through factories, mills, and coal mines across Britain. Despite its size, the Strike failed and thousands of strikers were prosecuted. Among the Strike's goals was the adoption of the 'People's Charter', which included universal manhood suffrage, annual parliamentary elections, and a secret ballot.[84] The campaign for the Charter focused upon the production of huge petitions which were presented to Parliament in 1839, 1842, and 1848. The rejection of the 1842 petition, which contained over three million signatures, stretched for six miles, and required thirty men to carry it, had provoked public unrest, but the failure of the 1848 petition saw the campaign lose energy and wane.[85] The Chartist critique identified the abrogation of historic political rights as the cause of, and the restoration of those rights as the remedy for, their grievances.[86] Their arguments were primarily constitutional, focusing upon political oppression rather than economic exploitation. This placed them in philosophical conflict with the Owenites, although local studies suggest that many participated in both movements, such that it is 'frequently not helpful, to seek to draw hard lines between Chartists and Owenites'.[87] The same coincidence of philosophical conflict and political cooperation can be seen in the participation of many Spencean 'ultra-radicals' in Owenism, with socialism appealing to their nostalgia for community, yearning for economic independence, and desire for self-improvement.[88]

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[81] Goldstein, *Political Censorship of the Arts and the Press*, 56.
[82] Scriven, *Popular Virtue*, 74.
[83] Jenkins, *The General Strike of 1842*, 21.
[84] Jenkins, 144.
[85] Chase, *Chartism*.
[86] Epstein, 'The Constitutional Idiom'; Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*.
[87] Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites', 17; See also Claeys's discussion of James Napier Bailey as offering a bridge between Chartism and Owenism Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 234–38.
[88] McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 198–200.

Owenites were enthusiastic about the possibilities of technological progress, which they argued could reduce the intensity and duration of work, so they would soon be able to work for only 'eight', 'five or six' or merely 'a few' hours per day.[89] However, they also argued that these possibilities would be realised only if machinery was managed and owned cooperatively, working 'with' rather than 'against' labourers. Their optimism about the productive potential of machinery is understandable. In the early nineteenth-century, Britain was the most sophisticated economy in the world, consuming coal, iron, and cotton and producing steam power at rates far in advance of its European neighbours. Some industries, such as iron and cotton production, experienced radical transformations. By the 1840s, handloom weaving was almost entirely mechanised and over 80% of English cotton mills were steam powered.[90] Yet, this was not yet the era of the large factory; only a fifth of labourers in the cotton industry worked in factories employing more than fifty people.[91] Change was also uneven, with the manufacturing of silk, linen, leather remaining almost entirely unmechanised. While the railway was the grand symbol of the 'Mechanical Age', with great fanfare greeting the opening of the Manchester and Liverpool Railway in 1831, there was only 600 miles of railway in Britain by 1838 (this grew to over 6000 miles by 1851).[92] Many of the most significant changes were not technological, but social, with an accelerating shift away from domestic production and household self-sufficiency and towards the specialisation of labour, the organisation of work in factories, and increased consumption expenditure. This saw rapid urban growth as the proportion of the workforce employed in agriculture fell from 35% in 1801 to 22% in 1851. Even this should not be exaggerated. Despite the fall, agriculture remained the most common occupation (alongside domestic service).[93] Although the progress of industrialisation and social change was uneven, it provoked a breathless reaction. Even in 1814, when the diffusion of technological change was limited, economist Patrick Colquhoun was expressing 'wonder and astonishment' at 'the progress of manufactures in Great Britain within the last thirty

[89] *Crisis* no.3, 16, 'The Catechism' (14 December 1833), 125; A Fellow Labourer [William Heighton], *An Address to the Members of Trade Societies*, 31; Gray, *A Lecture on Human Happiness*, 57.
[90] Berg, *The Machinery Question*, 22–24. It is unsurprising that Owen, who had made his fortune in the cotton industry, should have been an enthusiast about the possibilities of mechanisation and industrialisation.
[91] Berg, 27.
[92] Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics 1750-1970*, 582.
[93] Deane and Cole, *British Economic Growth 1688–1959*, 143; 167.

years'.[94] Two decades later, Andrew Ure was proudly announcing that Britain was 'pre-eminent among civilized nations for the prodigious development of its factory wealth'.[95]

Attitudes towards this new 'Age of Machinery' exposed a deep cultural divide. Thomas Carlyle observed that while the people were 'better fed, clothed, lodged and in all outward respects, accommodated', this came at a cost; '[o]nly the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us'.[96] Resistance to, or lamentation about, this mechanical age intersected with attitudes towards the ascendancy of political economy and Malthusian population theory to provoke 'one of the enduring fault-lines in British cultural debate…separating economists from the self-appointed spokesmen for human beings'.[97] Suspicion about increasing mechanisation also reflected the growing prominence of a romantic sensibility which celebrated emotion, nature, and the sublime. It was a shift which could be seen in rising millennialist speculation about the apocalypse or the Tractarian campaign to restore tradition and monasticism to the Church of England.[98] Such a shift was sympathetic to understandings of society as a benevolent, hierarchical, organic community in which landowners had duties to those who were worse off, and in which contemporary luxury was compared unfavourably to a recent past of bucolic simplicity.[99]

1.4 Three Precursors

In Section 1.4, I offer three clarifications about the terminology used in this thesis and the scope of the argument. The first concerns the geographical scope of this thesis, which is confined to British

[94] Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire*, 68.
[95] Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures*, 6.
[96] *Edinburgh Review* no. 49 'Signs of the Times' - Thomas Carlyle (March-June 1829), 441.
[97] Waterman, 'The Sudden Separation of Political Economy', 119.
[98] Lockley, 'Mapping Protestant Communalism', 32–34. It has also been argued that the appeal of Owenite community to urban labourers, with its emphasis upon a nostalgic, pastoral return to nature and to the immediate, emotionally rich relationships of rural life, can be understood only through the lens of romanticism. Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 239–45.
[99] Gregory Claeys identifies the importance of paternalism to socialism, emphasising 'the extent to which socialism from its origins would insist upon the paternal duties of governments towards the poor. So, too, it invoked the memory of a society, regarded as only recently lost, in which landowners and masters, without being identified with any particular party, took such responsibilities seriously and did not abandon their servants and labourers to the vaguaries of the market'. Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 40; See also, Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism, and Nostalgia*, 36–47. Ophélie Siméon argues that the young Owen was a 'paternalistic entrepreneur rather than a socialist'. Siméon, *Robert Owen's Experiment at New Lanark*, 4.

and Irish Owenism. I do not discuss Owenite activities elsewhere. This excludes, for example, the small group of followers of Owen in France, including Marc-Antoine Jullien, editor of the Revue Encyclopédique, Joseph Rey, and Jules Gay.[100] It also excludes Owenites in the United States of America, where, in addition to New Harmony, there were a series of communities influenced by Owenism.[101] There was frequent communication and migration across the Atlantic, transporting people and ideas, and reports from American colonies and societies were printed in British journals. However, the distinct political, economic, and religious contexts of the two countries, and the differences in focus and tone of the movement in each, demand that Owenites in Britain and the United States be treated separately.[102]

Second, in this thesis I refer to *Anglicanism* and the Church of *England* while discussing *British* socialism. Many prominent Owenites were not English; Alexander Campbell and Abram Combe were Scottish, William Thompson and Lloyd Jones were both Irish. Robert Owen had been born in Wales and made his fortune in Scotland. Further, communities were founded across (what was then) the British Isles, including Orbiston in Scotland, Ralahine in Ireland, and Pant Glas in Wales.[103] Nonetheless, I refer to Owenism as *British* rather than *British and Irish* in the interests of brevity and in virtue of the movement's limited strength across the Irish Sea. It might seem odd, therefore, that I refer to *Anglicanism* and to the *Church of England*. This is unproblematic for Welsh socialists – the Established Church in Wales was an Anglican church and Welsh dioceses were part of the Church of England until disestablishment in 1920. However, the Church of Scotland was a separate and non-Anglican institution. In part, I refer to Anglicanism in the absence of an adequate alternatives. 'Protestantism' is over-inclusive in that it includes many strands of Christianity, including Rational Dissent, with which I contrast Anglicanism. It is also, perhaps, under-inclusive, given that it is an open question whether the Anglican Church is itself Protestant or whether it is instead a 'via media' between Reformed or Lutheran Protestants and Catholics. In part, I refer to Anglicanism because many Owenite complaints

[100] Drolet and Frobert, 'The "Science of Education" and Owenism'.
[101] Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*; Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*.
[102] As such, I will not be interested in the subject which J.F.C. Harrison describes as 'the central feature of Owenism', that is 'the dual nature of its role in two such different societies as early nineteenth-century Britain and America'. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 2.
[103] For Pant Glas, see Armytage, 'Pant Glas: A Communitarian Experiment in Merionethshire'.

applied only to the Church of England. Complaints about the conduct of bishops did not apply to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Challenges to the Thirty-Nine Articles did not bear upon the Church of Scotland because they were not part of the Church's Confession. And criticism of Establishment was not relevant to the unestablished Church of Scotland. Other complaints were aimed specifically at the Anglican clergy in respect of the social and political functions which they performed as magistrates or in administering education. It is, therefore, in virtue of the absence of an adequate alternative and in order to identify the ways in which many Owenite critiques were specifically of *Anglicanism* that I refer to the Church of *England* while discussing *British* socialists.

Third, in this thesis I primarily refer to Owenite socialism and 'religion' rather than Owenite socialism and 'Christianity'. In early nineteenth-century Britain, Christianity was the dominant religion, and experience of interactions with those of non-Christian faiths would have been limited.[104] For many Owenites, 'religion' would have been largely synonymous with 'Christianity', with their understanding of the abstract category being shaped by their experiences of Christian denominations, especially Anglicanism, Methodism, and Old Dissent. However, this thesis will describe the Owenite engagement with 'religion' rather than 'Christianity' for three reasons. First, it avoids classificatory controversies over whether certain forms of Unitarianism or Deism should be understood as 'Christianity'. Second, Owenite journals and tracts do discuss other faiths, including Islam, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism, drawing upon the accounts of travellers and on the history of religion. Third, Owenites do also reflect upon the nature and function of religion as such, rather than being concerned only with the features of Christianity. This thesis will therefore use the term 'religion'.

[104] In 1840, it is estimated that 99.5% of the British population identified as being Christians. Around 0.3% of the population identified as having no religion, and 0.2% as being Jewish. While these statistics do not reflect the visibility or cultural presence of other faiths, they do illustrate the dominant position of Christianity. Field, 'Counting Religion in England and Wales'.

Chapter 2: The State of the Literature

This chapter will explore interpretations of the relationship between Owenite socialism and religion, interpretations which differ in their understanding of both the *nature* and the *importance* of this relationship. Some scholars have argued that Owenites were determinedly anti-religious, that they conferred central importance on a critique of religion as erroneous and pernicious, and in so doing they contributed to the development of Secularism from the 'infidel' tradition of Thomas Paine or Richard Carlile.[1] Others argue that Christian Owenites were 'a significant proportion of Owen's supporters', and that these Christian Owenites scoured scripture to find justifications for the Owenite account of character formation, identifying evidence of its truth in the Lord's Prayer's plea that one not be 'led into temptation'.[2] Such was the influence of these Christian Owenites that, on one account, the *Pioneer*, among the most prominent Owenite journals, 'might almost, in a sense, be called a Christian Socialist paper'.[3] Other accounts emphasise that Owenites were indebted to Christianity in different ways and with different implications. Some suggest that the Owenite strategy of achieving change through the establishment of communities was itself borrowed from the Protestant communalism of the Moravians, Harmonists, or Shakers. Others emphasise the dependence of Owenites upon a framework of Christian millennialism, whether because of their experience of the social dislocation of early industrialism, because they lacked other ways to articulate their optimism about the prospect of radical change, or conversely because of the absence of available means to achieve their ends.[4] Or focus is trained upon the Owenites as akin to a 'sect' who responded to their failures of the early 1830s by abandoning activity which directly pursued social change and sought instead to retreat from a corrupting world.[5] Others note the Owenite advertisement of a novel 'rational religion', although often this is translated into an appeal for a richer morality, attributed to an attempt to compete upon conventionally religious terrain, or analogised to subsequent 'secular religions such as Comte's Religion of Humanity. Or they identify Owenites as themselves declaring socialism to be

[1] Frow and Frow, *The New Moral World*; Royle, *Radical Politics*; Royle, *Victorian Infidels*.
[2] Lockley, 'Christian Doubt and Hope in Early Socialism', 373.
[3] Binyon, *The Christian Socialist Movement in England*, 43.
[4] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 100–104; Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 160; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.
[5] Taylor, 'Explaining the Origins of Socialism', 396; Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 87–106.

a 'new humanist religion', with its own social 'hymns', social 'missionaries' and with a *Book of the New Moral World* which functioned as 'a sort of sacred text for the Owenites'.[6]

As the variety of these accounts suggests, the nature and importance of the Owenite relationship with religion has been a subject of significant disagreement. In some instances that disagreement is a direct and clear incompatibility. In others, it is a more diffuse difference about the significance of a particular influence or the meaning of a practice. The goal of this chapter is to prepare the ground for the argument of Chapters 3 and 5, which will demonstrate the nature and importance of a particular engagement with religion to the thought and action of Owenite socialists. This chapter will prepare the ground in that it will lay out how scholars have understood this engagement. I will also venture criticisms of these accounts where those accounts have misconceived or exaggerated the importance of a particular facet of the movement. In some cases, those accounts directly conflict with the interpretation which I offer in this thesis, and therefore the criticisms which I offer are helpful to my own interpretation in that they serve to weaken rival accounts. In other cases, those accounts are compatible with my own interpretation, and so those criticisms stand independently.

In Section 2.1, I examine some interpretations of the Owenite engagement with religion. Most prominent have been accounts which emphasise the millennialist or sectarian tendencies of the movement, with considerable disagreement as to how to explain these features. I argue that these tendencies, and religious forms of expression and organisation more generally, have been widely presented as inhibiting participation in mature politics. I also describe how Owenite socialism has been interpreted as a stage in the development of secularism. I argue that such accounts create a reductive dichotomy between those who are 'for' and 'against' religion, focus too intently upon the critical engagement with and not accompanying positive re-construction of religion, and lean too heavily upon the later careers of figures such as Charles Southwell and G.J. Holyoake as evidence of the movement's nature. I also identify the ways in which Owenism has been understood as a religion, as performing the function of a religion, and as adopting practices from contemporary Christianity.

[6] Stedman Jones, 'Utopian Socialism Reconsidered', 142; Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen*, 48.

In Section 2.2, I discuss how the Owenite engagement with religion has been marginalised in scholarship of Owenism because the movement has been understood as a precursor, founder, or development phase in the emergence of socialism or trades unionism. Such an understanding focuses attention upon questions furnished by the later history of socialism, such as whether Owenite socialism was grounded in a language of class or developed a labour theory of value. Or upon the concerns of the later labour movement, such as the nature of the relationship between employers and labourers. In virtue of certain assumptions about the nature of socialism and of the labour movement, this has also led to Owenite socialism being considered alongside grand narratives of modernisation, proletarianization and secularisation, as tied to the emergence of a naturally secular, nascent proletariat. These conceptions of Owenism as a stage in the development of socialism have led to the engagement with religion being perceived to be extraneous and inessential.

2.1 Owenism and Religion

In Section 2.1, I discuss how scholars have interpreted the Owenite engagement with religion.

First, in Section 2.1.1, I note how the movement embraced individuals with a variety of doctrinal commitments, including atheists, orthodox Anglicans, Dissenters, and those involved in forms of millennialism or ecstatic religion. However, I argue that such doctrinal commitments or denominational identities are often orthogonal to the important questions about the relationship between socialism and religion which are considered in this thesis.

In Section 2.1.2, I discuss presentations of Owenites as anti-religious. On these accounts, Owenites participated in a tradition stretching backwards to the 'infidelity' of Richard Carlile and onwards to G.J. Holyoake's Secularism. I describe how contentious debates between socialists and anti-socialist Christians were useful to both sides as a source of publicity and revenue, and that the philosophical controversies as stake were not conflicts between Owenism and 'Christianity' as such. I also argue that accounts of Owenism as essentially hostile to religion lean too heavily upon Charles Southwell, whose commitment to socialism was ambivalent, and too heavily upon the relationship with later Secularism,

which was a function of Holyoake's political entrepreneurship more than a reflection of something basic about Owenism.

In Section 2.1.3, I note that Owenites have been understood as borrowing language, practices, and structures of thought from contemporary Christians. I describe how a recognition that Owenites sang 'hymns' and included social 'missionaries', conceals disagreement about *why* they did so. I then focus attention upon three traditions of religious thought and action which have been suggested as influencing Owenite socialism. First, Owenites have been described as inhabiting a tradition of millennialism. I argue that such descriptions are unhelpful because of the complexity of the concept, because the concept is freighted with implications about psychological distress, and because a narrow focus upon millennialism leaves an impression that religious influences obstructed mature, reasoned engagement in politics. Second, Owenites have been described as being, or being like, a 'sect'. I also raise doubts about this characterisation, which implies disparate claims about the organisation's activities, ultimate goals, ethos, and the factors which explain these features, and encourages misleading inferences about the relationship between these dimensions of the movement. Third, Owenites have been interpreted as inheriting a tradition of Protestant communalism.

In Section 2.1.4, I describe how the Owenite attempt to establish a 'rational religion' has been interpreted. I note how interpretations have tended to translate this 'rational religion' into terms which are both more secular and more reassuringly socialist. Such interpretations maintain that the rational religion is *really* about morality (Section 2.1.4.1), explain the rational religion as having the form of a religion only because socialists were competing on traditionally religious terrain to claim moral and epistemic authority (Section 2.1.4.2), or offer misleading analogies to 'secular religions' such as Comte's 'Religion of Humanity' (Section 2.1.4.3).

In Section 2.1, I organise interpretations of Owenism under several broad themes according to a focus upon Owenites as anti-religious, as having borrowed certain structures of thought or action from religions, and as having presented a rational religion. However, such an organisation does conceal the disagreements about the nature of each of those claims. While some scholars might agree that Owenites had a contentious relationship with the representatives of religious institutions, this obscures

dissensus about the nature and causes of that conflict. It also conceals dissensus about the importance of that conflict. That is, one might argue that Owenites adopted an anti-religious stance yet maintains that this was largely trivial, that it was merely peripheral to the primary concerns and activities of the movement. Nonetheless, I elect for this categorisation in the interests of simplicity, but will note disagreements about the nature, causes, and importance of these different focuses as they arise.

2.1.1 Denominational Identities and Doctrinal Commitments

In Section 2.1.1, I note that biographical evidence about prominent Owenites suggests that they held a variety of denominational identities and doctrinal commitments. However, I question what can be learned from this fact, given that such figures were often atypical and given that such individual denominational identities and commitments are orthogonal to the subjects to be discussed in this thesis.

Owen himself has been variously described as 'a self-proclaimed atheist', 'a militant atheist', a 'conservative deist', or as a follower of first 'deism' then of 'rational agnosticism'.[7] It is unclear whether this is primarily a disagreement about Owen's own beliefs or whether instead it is a disagreement about the meaning of these concepts. There is, however, consensus that he also became interested in spiritualism towards the end of his life, although there is disagreement as to whether this was a 'perfectly predictable epilogue to the sustained engagement with religion and reason visible throughout the totality of his work and activism'.[8] Or whether instead, this was merely one of his 'foibles', into which he had a 'relapse…in his old age', a time when 'the balance of his mind had gone' and he had become the 'willing dupe of mediums'.[9] William Thompson also exemplifies the indifference or hostility to Christian institutions among Owenites. Thompson was one of the 'most influential of the Owenite socialists' and the 'major challenger' to Robert Owen's leadership of the early socialist movement prior to his death in 1833.[10] He was widely respected as a political economist for his works

[7] Sargent, 'The Social and Political Ideas of the American Communitarians', 49; Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*; Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 2; Davis, 'Robert Owen and Religion', 94–95; 108.
[8] Davis, 'Robert Owen and Religion', 109.
[9] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 251; Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 35; 312; 307.
[10] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 107.

An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth (1824) and *Labor Rewarded* (1827).[11] Historians disagree as to whether he was a 'convinced atheist' or whether he was merely a rationalist suspicious of the exploitative uses of religion by the wealthy and powerful.[12] They do agree, however, that he conferred little time or attention to religious questions. There were clearly many others who shared such views. As William Hawkes Smith noted in 1840, 'many Socialists are unbelievers in Christianity', although he dismissed the significance of such unbelief when noting that 'this is not a necessary consequence of their system'.[13]

The movement was also able to accommodate orthodox Anglicans. Arthur Savage Wade was an Anglican minister who chaired meetings of both the GNCTU and of a campaign to establish a new co-operative association under Robert Owen's leadership in December 1831. He also famously marched 'in full canonicals' at the head of an April 1834 protest supporting the Tolpuddle Martyrs, a group of Dorset labourers who had become a cause célèbre after they were punished with transportation for swearing a secret oath.[14] Another Anglican Owenite was John Minter Morgan, who has been credited with introducing the symbol of the beehive as an emblem of the co-operative movement with his popularisation of Owenite ideas *The Revolt of the Bees* (1826).[15] Minter Morgan succeeded in 'reconcil[ing] Owenite beliefs with membership of the Church of England' by distinguishing between Owen's personal views on revealed religion and the practical prescriptions of socialism.[16] He rejected the idea that 'vital Christianity' could bring about 'true Christian benevolence'. Instead, he argued, only socialism, with its transformation of social institutions and achievement of a scientific political economy, could inculcate widespread Christian virtue.[17] Further, the Book of Acts demonstrated the divine endorsement for the adoption of a community of goods.[18] Although he continued to support the establishment of communities, by 1840 he had distanced himself from

[11] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 64.
[12] Lane, 'William Thompson, Class and His Irish Context', 38; Pankhurst, *William Thompson*, 122–24.
[13] Smith, *Sir, Having Observed Your Name Connected with a Reprobation*, 2.
[14] Lloyd, 'Dr. Wade and the Working Class', 70–75.
[15] Saville, 'John Minter Morgan (1782-1854)', 248; Max Beer described Minter Morgan as one of the 'main representatives' of Owenite views. Beer, *A History of British Socialism*, xx.
[16] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 33.
[17] Binyon, *The Christian Socialist Movement in England*, 44–46.
[18] Minter Morgan, quoted in Saville, 'John Minter Morgan (1782-1854)', 247; Lockley, 'Christian Doubt and Hope in Early Socialism', 373–77.

mainstream Owenism, and in June 1841 he launched his own plan for 'self-supporting villages' which included a prominent role for the Church of England.[19] On G.C. Binyon's account, he was a 'true forerunner of Christian Socialism' because he understood the 'significance of Owenism…in reviving the Christian social ideals of earlier times'.[20] Minter Morgan was not alone; William King also viewed co-operation as the instantiation of the biblical command that one 'love your neighbour as yourself' and that Owen's practical plans could easily be distinguished from his personal views on religion. [21] King lamented that

> when a man invents a useful machine, or constructs a beautiful building, or makes wide researches into the truths of natural history, we never refuse to admire or use the produce of his labour and ingenuity, till we have enquired into his religious creed.[22]

Although figures like Minter Morgan were successful in 'reconcil[ing] Owenite beliefs with membership of the Church of England', the fact that this was 'remarkable to his contemporaries' reflects that this was not a widely-shared position. These were not, however, isolated figures, with many Owenites continuing to attend church and chapel, such that Christians made up 'a significant proportion of Owen's supporters'.[23]

There were also prominent Dissenters including as John Finch and W.H. Smith. John Finch established the First Liverpool Co-operative Society in 1829, attended numerous Co-operative Congresses, and was briefly the Governor of the Queenwood community. He was clearly deeply religious, although again scholars have disagreed about the nature of this commitment. Did he maintain that Owenism was 'in full accord with Christianity', with socialism enjoying scriptural warrant and co-operative societies having the goal of making 'Christian precepts the very foundation and law of their conduct'.[24] Or did he argue that Owen was itself true Christianity and that Owen should be understood as a 'religious leader'?[25] Or was it the case that only as time passed did he increasingly

[19] Armytage, 'John Minter Morgan's Schemes 1841-1855'; Corina, 'Minter Morgan, John'.
[20] Binyon, *The Christian Socialist Movement in England*, 44.
[21] Binyon, 47; Corina, 'William King (1786–1865)', 174.
[22] Binyon, *The Christian Socialist Movement in England*, 46.
[23] Lockley, 'Christian Doubt and Hope in Early Socialism', 373.
[24] Saville, 'John Minter Morgan (1782-1854)', 118; Murphy, 'Robert Owen in Liverpool', 91; Garnett, *Co-Operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities*, 54.
[25] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 125–26; Rose, 'John Finch', 171–72; Royle, *Victorian Infidels*.

come to 'regard socialism itself as a religion', losing his 'commonsense, so that instead of advising Owen coolly and intelligently he now often encouraged Owen's natural inclination to underestimate the obstacles confronting socialists and to think of himself as being in some ways a Messiah'.[26]

Other Owenites were involved in forms of enthusiastic and millennialist religion. Most prominently, James 'Elishama' Smith. Smith had first trained to be a Church of Scotland minister before moving to Ashton-under-Lyne to join the Christian Israelites, a group who had gathered under John Wroe, a self-described prophet who was seeking to succeed to the leadership of the Southcottian movement.[27] In 1832, Smith moved to London, and rapidly ascended in Owenism to become the editor of the *Crisis* in September 1833, presiding over the journal at a time of intensifying trade union activity before the GNCTU collapsed in summer 1834.[28] In these years, Smith's influence is striking and his publications were widely read; at times his titles made up a fifth of all works available for purchase from Owenite booksellers.[29] The *Crisis* closed in 1834 in acrimony, and a disagreement with Owen led Smith to found his own journal, the *Shepherd*, before editing a 'series of magazines in which his extremism was now more muted'.[30] There is disagreement about how consistent Smith's beliefs were across these periods of his life. John Saville argues that Smith oscillated between secular and religious positions, with his earlier religious millenarianism becoming 'muted' when he adopted Owenite radicalism.[31] This has been rejected by Philip Lockley, who maintains that Smith's political radicalism was itself grounded in 'his understanding of how God intended Christians to be conscious of their agency in realizing the millennium'.[32] Even during his period as an Owenite, he continued to espouse Southcottian ideas, retaining the same stadial account of history, the same emphasis on the importance of labour in achieving salvation, and the same stress upon unity which was prominent in Southcott's prophecies.[33]

[26] Murphy, 'Robert Owen in Liverpool', 91.
[27] Stunt, 'Smith, James Elishama'.
[28] Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, 113–14.
[29] Of the twenty-five books listed for sale by Abel Heywood in the *Social Pioneer* in 1839, five were written or translated by Smith. *Social Pioneer*, no.1, 4, 'Books Sold by A. Heywood…' (30 March 1839), 32.
[30] Stunt, 'Smith, James Elishama'.
[31] Saville, 'J. E. Smith and the Owenite Movement, 1833-4'.
[32] Lockley, *Visionary Religion and Radicalism*, 212.
[33] Lockley, 234–40.

It is, however, unclear how much one can learn from the denominational identities and doctrinal commitments of these Owenites. Many of these figures were atypical and so their views might have been unrepresentative of the broader movement. Finch, Minter Morgan, and Thompson were all wealthy individuals who adopted leadership roles and published widely. This contrasts with the majority of the movement, who were drawn from the respectable reaches of the working classes and who have left little impression upon the historical record. More importantly, these considerations of doctrinal belief and identity are orthogonal to many of the questions discussed in this chapter. Such questions might concern understandings of the relationship between socialism and religion, of the role that religion might play in communities, the connection between (social) science and religion, or of the implications of the adoption of religious language. One conclusion that can be drawn from the variety of these biographies is that Owenite ideology was highly flexible, open to being refashioned and reimagined in different ways, to being endorsed by, and justified in the terms of, practising Anglicans, Unitarians, mystics, and deists. Owenism could both be reconciled with 'membership of the Church of England' and be 'sufficiently millenarian to be acceptable as a parallel or alternative to religious sects of the Southcottian type'.[34] As John Finch noted in his *Moral Code of the New Moral World*, 'it is true that some Socialists do, and some do not acknowledge the authority of the Bible'.[35]

2.1.2 Owenites as Anti-Religious

In Section 2.1.2, I describe accounts of Owenite socialism as trenchantly anti-religious. I describe the 'Paine-Carlile tradition' of folk scepticism and rationalism in which several scholars have placed the Owenites. I argue that attempts to explain the religious interests of Owenites as flowing from their participation in this 'Paine-Carlile tradition' occlude the extent to which Owenite religious thought was both creative and grounded in the movement's own socialist philosophy. I then note that public debates between socialists and anti-socialist Christians were very common, ranging over topics such as Original Sin, responsibility, and marriage. However, I argue that these debates do not reflect a disagreement between Owenites and 'Christianity', but rather a disagreement between Owenites and

[34] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 33; 122.
[35] Finch, *Moral Code of the New Moral World*.

advocates of one particular form of Anglican theology. I then note that accounts of anti-religious campaigning as fundamental to Owenite socialism lean too heavily upon Charles Southwell, whose commitment to socialism was brief and ambivalent. And upon G.J. Holyoake, whose creation of the Secularist movement from the ruins of Owenite socialism reflects his political entrepreneurship rather than anything essential about Owenite socialism which was there *all along*.

On one account, many Owenites were trenchantly anti-religious and this anti-religious stance was central to their activities. Such an account situates Owenites as inheriting a tradition inspired by, and continuous with, Thomas Paine and Richard Carlile, who each married rationalism, suspicion of authority and tradition, confidence in science, and anti-clericalism. This account also identifies these Owenites as sustaining and preserving that tradition, until it developed into an organised Secularist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Paine-Carlile tradition was itself a codification of earlier forms of folk scepticism and materialism, a tradition of pugnacious anticlericalism, independence of thought, ideas about the self-creation of the universe, identification of authority with the Antichrist.[36] Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* had been first published in 1794. He argued for the right to freedom of conscience, and of the need for each to be able to subject their own beliefs to reason. He argued that God spoke through reason, and that Revelation offered an insight into God's will only insofar as it conformed with reason. He rejected the Church's claims to authority, baulked at the irrationality of the idea of a God who would kill his own Son, argued that the doctrine of Redemption was merely a scheme for the Church to extract profit, and maintained that there was no evidence to confirm that the Old Testament was divinely endorsed. Having rejected the claims of authority and discarded any dogmatic claims which did not conform to reason, he did offer a positive argument for deism. He maintained that there was abundant evidence to justify belief in the power, wisdom, and goodness of a Deity.

Paine's arguments were largely a restatement of earlier deist arguments concerning the internal and external evidence for the authenticity of the Bible and for the evidences of a benevolent and rational God which could be found in nature. However the novelty of Paine's work was in 'how he says it and

[36] Nash, 'The (Long) Nineteenth Century'.

to whom…Paine's work was read by a new generation and by a much broader public, including the lower orders, than had been reached by the earlier controversy, which had raged only among the educated and well-to-do members of a patrician culture'.[37] The fact that Paine spoke to such a broad audience, and in a context in which there were rising fears about heterodoxy corroding social bonds and inviting revolutionary disruption, was the prime reason that his work was so controversial. Despite the fact that it was primarily a defence of religion against rising French atheism, and which enlisted many of the conventional arguments of mainstream natural theology, Paine was read by sympathisers and opponents alike as more radical and dangerous than he was. By the 1820s, Paine's works were being popularised by Richard Carlile and Paine himself had been adopted as 'an "infidel" and a "radical" (neither of which he had been) rather than as a Deist and an enemy of the hereditary principle (which he had)'.[38] Carlile himself wavered between deism and a form of atheist materialism which was, ironically, one of the targets of Paine's *Age of Reason*. This oscillation could be accommodated within a tradition which focused primarily upon 'priestcraft' and upon the application of rational reading to scripture, and did not demand philosophical precision. Instead, there were 'incompletely theorized agreements', in which concurrence about the venality of the priesthood or upon the hypocrisy of contemporary Christians or the inconsistencies in scripture could conceal disagreement about the precise reasons or implications of such critiques.[39] Carlile also married these views with a trenchant condemnation of 'kingcraft' and with protests against the laws which were being used to enforce censorship. Carlile was imprisoned for selling his and Paine's works, and was joined by others who sold his works or who worked in his bookshop. This cemented the relationship between this strand of popular rationalism and campaigns for the abolition of penalties for the expression of ideas. Culturally, this was a tradition of rationalism, of hostility to forms of superstition, and a fervent belief in the power of reason and in the possibilities of new forms of scientific understanding which encouraged openness to forms of heterodox science such as phrenology or phreno-magnetism.[40] The activities and institutions of organised freethought did also bear some resemblances to religious

[37] Philp, *Paine*, 109.
[38] Clark, *Thomas Paine*, 403.
[39] Sunstein, 'Incompletely Theorized Agreements'.
[40] Prothero, *Artisans & Politics*, 259–65.

groups, especially to the Dissenters. Scholars are, however, divided as to whether this should be seen as 'isomorphism', in which heterodox causes often mirror the beliefs and practices which they oppose. Or whether instead, freethought should itself be seen as an 'anti-religious sect', fulfilling the 'emotional and social satisfactions of the religious life' but 'without the burden of a dogma based on revealed religion'.[41]

This tradition also accommodated figures like Robert Taylor, the 'Devil's Chaplain', who forged a theatrical brand of pagan morality, romantic cosmology, and pantomime in his services at the Rotunda between 1830 and 1833.[42] These performances reflected the burlesque quality, and tone of gaiety and ribaldry which also marked the 'Paine-Carlile tradition'. This also reflected the convergence with the earlier, blasphemous, insurrectionary culture of a group of London Spenceans in the post-Napoleonic period.[43] Broadly, this was a tradition which entwined religious and political concerns, in which plebeian anti-clericalism and hostility to the state church were situated within a broader radical worldview which condemned vested interests and assailed the constraints on freedom of the taxes on knowledge.[44] An important feature of this tradition was a tone of confrontation, often coupled with satire and performance, and coupled with a form of political libertarianism.

Edward Royle argues that many Owenites 'faithfully embodied the aspirations' and shared the methods of this tradition.[45] For David Nash, Owenites were the natural successors to Carlile. They shared Carlile's 'quest for publicity', provoking public confrontations which attracted attention to their cause, although their means of pursuing this quest 'made Owenism appear almost a religiously sectarian organization and several social Missionaries applied for preacher's licenses'.[46] The identification of Owenites as inheriting and participating in this tradition not only identifies them as conferring central importance on an 'infidel' crusade, but also as inhabiting a tone of confrontation and hostility to authority and convention. An understanding of Owenites as participants in this tradition is encouraged by the overlaps which exist in location and in personnel. The Rotunda, which

[41] Royle, 'Secularists and Rationalists, 1800-1940'.
[42] McCalman, *Radical Underworld*; McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion in Early Victorian England', 55–62.
[43] McCalman, *Radical Underworld*.
[44] Nash, 'The (Long) Nineteenth Century', 216.
[45] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 3.
[46] Nash, 'The (Long) Nineteenth Century', 217.

hosted Carlile and Taylor, was the site of meetings of the National Union of the Working Classes in the early 1830s and was the home of the National Equitable Labour Exchange between January and May 1833.[47] The Owenite movement also included some former followers of Carlile, such as C.J. Haslam and Lawrence Pitkethly.[48] There are common features: a shared interest in science as supplying new ways to understand the world, a confidence in reason as providing clear answers accessible to all, hostility to forms of tradition, and concern about the use of mystical religion to preserve of the old, irrational world. Clearly, these accounts of Owenism as being concerned with anti-religious propagandising draw support from Robert Owen's own writings. In the same 1817 speech which was anointed by Fabian socialist Graham Wallas as the founding moment of British socialism, Robert Owen announced that all religions were in error and had to be abolished.[49]

Edward Royle argues that, for a 'good number' of Owenites, Owen's 'attacks on religion and his enlightenment radicalism…[were] an integral part of his wider social schemes.'[50] However, there are doubts about how widely shared this belief was. Royle notes that there was division and tension between those who 'chose to emphasise the social schemes' while others 'continued to concentrate on the irreligious aspects of Owenism'.[51] Journals such as the *Co-operator* and the *Co-operative Magazine* distanced themselves from Owen's views on religion, castigating him for 'having pretended to doubt the real truth of the Gospel' and expressing confusion at his needless 'religio phobia'.[52] These journals reflected the views of Owenites who argued that their economic analysis should be the focus while views on religion and the family should be abandoned.[53] It is unclear as to how these disagreements intersected with other differences in the movement, and whether anti-religious agitation was more widely-shared and more important for the movement's leaders or for members. Is this a case of pragmatic leaders seeking to temper agitated and confrontational members, or of practical members striving against their eccentric leaders to reorient the movement towards their pressing temporal concerns? Royle argues that, by 1839, there was a tension between members committed to 'the

[47] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*.
[48] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 50.
[49] Wallas, *Men & Ideas*, 65.
[50] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 2.
[51] Royle, 3.
[52] *The Co-operator,* 27, 'Christianity' (1 July 1830), 108; *Co-operative Magazine*, no.2, 12, (December 1827), 533-4.
[53] Thornes, 'Change and Continuity in the Development of Co-Operation', 33.

democratic radicalism of the Paine-Carlile tradition' and the Central Board, who were more concerned with respectability and with encouraging affluent investors:

> The ordinary members and many of the lecturers had been brought up in the Paine-Carlile tradition, and had learned their radicalism through the blasphemous and seditious press. In Owenism they had found a philosophy congenial to their own ideas, and they relished the way in which the Christian Church could be attacked and its theology ridiculed with the weapons of Owenite thought. But to attack the old immoral world was hardly constructive, and capitalists were not likely to invest money in an organisation which had a reputation for undermining religion. Owenism was scarcely respectable, and so the Central Board had to take the blaspheming lecturers in hand. If Owenism was to succeed, its image at the grass roots would have to be changed.[54]

The Central Board was determined to focus upon establishing the Queenwood community, and so sought to avoid public controversies which might alienate creditors. This eventually led to the 'adoption of a pseudo-Christian religion' in an attempt to placate critics, a move which was rejected by socialist missionaries who had been reared in the Paine-Carlile tradition.[55] This account, of conflict between a conciliatory Central Board and anti-Christian membership is not universally endorsed. Gregory Claeys argues that it was the ordinary members who were more likely to desire 'religious trappings', with Owenite leaders cloaking their secular morality in religious terms as a 'useful means of drawing away adherents from the various Christian churches'.[56] Conversely, Hamish W. Fraser rejects the idea of this being a source of conflict at all, arguing that it was 'the secularist, anti-religious side of Owenism that held together the Owenite movement in the years after 1834'.[57]

Such accounts of Owenites as importantly anti-religious emphasise their participation in the 'Paine-Carlile' tradition and their inheritance of a culture of fervent rationalism, folk scepticism, and scientific enthusiasm. Yet, this implies that conflicts which arose between those 'brought up in the Paine-Carlile

[54] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 53.
[55] Royle, 66–69. The intersection between anti-Christian agitation and the adoption of a positive religion as an alternative is discussed further in Section 2.1.4.2.
[56] Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"', 25.
[57] Fraser, 'Robert Owen and the Workers', 95.

tradition' and those pursuing a conciliatory strategy reflect a tension between those influenced by a prior tradition of anti-religious radicalism and those who had elected to focus upon temporal goals. It suggests that the source of Owenite interest in religious questions was in an existing culture which was suspicious of authority and committed to a commonsensical materialism or in a prior tradition of deist or infidel scepticism. This occludes how Owenite religious engagement was grounded in the movement's philosophy, how this engagement was not a reflection of an existing cultural tendency or inherited from earlier 'infidelity', but was rooted in Owenite arguments. It was rooted in philosophical disputes over responsibility and sin, the moral status of poverty, or the ways in which the world was divinely endorsed. And in confrontations over questions about marriage or the social standing of women which required that Owenites either engage in scriptural interpretation or challenge the authority of the Bible to determine such questions. A focus upon the Paine-Carlile tradition conceals the extent to which such confrontations were expressive of Owenite philosophy. It also distracts from the positive and constructive accent in the socialist engagement with religious questions. It emphasises an instinctive hostility and so excludes consideration of socialist attempts at creative reimagination and reflection upon the nature and function of religion.

Conflict between socialists and anti-socialist Christians was manifested in both quotidian interactions and in high politics. After Robert Owen was permitted to present a petition to Queen Victoria in June 1839, his 'infidel' views incited the Bishop of Exeter Henry Phillpotts to deliver a speech in the House of Lords angrily condemning the Owenites.[58] The more routine forms of this conflict were found in the numerous public debates which took place between an Owenite lecturer and a member of the clergy. Such debates were an important part of the activity of the Owenite social missionary. Taking place in halls and meeting rooms, they often attracted large crowds and provided to the participants both public attention and some income from admission fees.[59] The reach of these debates would also be enhanced by the publication by each participant of a pamphlet documenting the exchange 'with some additions'.[60] These debates were also profitable for members of the clergy and professional anti-

[58] Edward Royle argues that this was merely a pretext for a political attack on a Whig government which had declined to investigate or persecute the Owenites. Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 65.
[59] Fraser, *Alexander Campbell and the Search for Socialism*, 77.
[60] Winks, *Christianity and Not Owenism*.

socialists such as John Brindley who relied upon the money from admissions fees.[61] The tone of these debates was hostile, with little attempt to achieve common ground and frequent interruptions of heckling and jeering from the audience. The critiques offered by Christian anti-socialists were expansive and vociferous. Socialists were 'selfish', 'envious of their fellow-creatures', and insincere in their claims about caring for the poor.[62] They were one of the 'devices of Satan' seeking to lead Christians astray.[63] Socialists wanted to euthanise disabled children.[64] Robert Owen was even guilty of plagiarising 'without acknowledgement' from Jesus.[65] Employers were urged to persecute their socialist employees and respectable members of society to shun socialists for their immoral atheism. Undoubtedly, these encounters would have only further deepened antipathy between Owenites and their anti-socialist opponents.

These debates offered the primary public forum in which the merits of socialism were debated and interrogated. In service of their goal of attracting attention to win publicity and draw paying attendees, these debates focused upon those contentious subjects upon which Owenites and their Christian anti-socialist opponents disagreed and which would therefore conduce to dramatic and compelling confrontations. This focus then implied that such subjects were the central concerns of socialism, relegating those subjects upon which the competing parties agreed or which were simply irrelevant to the fierce contestation between Owenites and their Christian opponents.[66] The format of these debates, and the imperative to encourage dramatic conflict, shaped the form of socialism which was presented. They suggested that socialism was to be counterposed against Christianity, and its merits appraised by its ability to answer doctrinal questions about the nature of God or divine judgment. The obvious frustrations of Owenite social missionary Robert Buchanan about this was evident when he fulminated against those 'theological tricksters, [whose object] was to destroy the effect of my lectures,

[61] Place, 'John Brindley'.
[62] Sturmer, *Socialism, Its Immoral Tendency*, 6–12.
[63] Hudson, *Christian Socialism, Explained and Enforced, and Compared with Infidel Fellowship*, ii.
[64] Roebuck, *Rev. J.H. Roebuck's Lectures. No. I*, 39.
[65] Winks, *Christianity and Not Owenism*, 12.
[66] One might also look to the very beginnings of socialism, and the concurrence between Robert Owen and his father-in-law, and predecessor as manager of New Lanark, David Dale. Dale was an 'Old Scots Independent' with Moravian sympathies, who held similar views to Owen on the formative influence of character and the need to establish new kinds of industrial settlement to shape human character. McLaren, *David Dale of New Lanark*.

by a theological squabble'.[67] Some of those 'theological squabbles' arose where Owenites advocated for the transformation of social practices or institutions and faced objections grounded in scripture or by theological appeals. Where they sought legal changes broadening access to divorce, they were told that 'God has declared [the law of marriage] to "honourable among all men"'.[68] When arguing for an improvement in the standing of women, they were confronted with biblical quotations which demanded the quiet submission of women to male authority.[69] In such cases, Owenite attempts to transform existing social institutions demanded also that they confront the scripturally-grounded or theologically-freighted arguments which were used to defend those institutions.

Other disagreements between Owenites and Christian anti-socialists were more directly doctrinal or philosophical, arising because endorsement of Owenite philosophy was understood to entail the rejection of certain theological tenets. This conferred particular importance upon these disagreements. They led Christian anti-socialists to believe that Owenites posed a mortal danger to the Church and were an obstacle to God's will. And they led Owenites to believe that socialism could triumph only when erroneous theological views had been corrected. They had conflicts over whether faith was an obstacle to the pursuit of truth, whether, as Robert Owen declared at an 1835 meeting of the AACAN, '[t]here never can be knowledge where there is blind faith; and there never can be real charity without knowledge'.[70] Or over whether the existing social order was divinely endorsed and therefore that it could not be altered. Owenites denied that it was divinely ordained that the world would be a site of suffering and trial, arguing that to accept such an idea was to accept one's temporal fate and foreclose the possibilities of change.[71] Or they rejected the idea that God alone could alter the world, bemoaning that such an idea would leave humans impotent, able only to acquiesce in divine ordinances. There were also disagreements about the relationship between poverty and morality. Some Christians

[67] *NMW*, no.4, 203, 'Sheffield – 3 Sept' – Robert Buchanan (15 September 1838), 378.
[68] This is a reference to the Book of Common Prayer, in which Matrimony is 'commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men'. Many critiques of Owenite views on marriage were particularly uncharitable. Owenites argued that limited access to divorce left many marriages 'artificial' and loveless. Yet they were charged with seeking to 'make our sisters and daughters common prostitutes, and our wives adultresses' or with promoting 'fornication, incest, adultery, and polygamy' as '*virtues* according to their "*new morality*"'. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, *Socialism*, 8–9; Sturmer, *Socialism, Its Immoral Tendency*, 14.
[69] Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism*; Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*.
[70] *NMW*, no.1, 28, 'The Great Public Meeting…' (9 May 1835), 217.
[71] *NMW*, no.6, 41, 'Socialism as it Should be Advocated' - S.M.T. (3 August 1839), 652.

opposed measures to reduce poverty because they believed that poverty created opportunities for beneficent and charitable behaviour on behalf of the affluent. Owenites found these claims morally repellent and practically misplaced, arguing that poverty only increased the temptations to vice among those who experienced the pressure to commit crime for survival or to indulge in intemperance for escapism.[72]

The most common contention, however, concerned the doctrine of circumstances, the claim that humans were not causally responsible for the formation of their characters. Christian anti-socialists understood this claim to imply that humans were not responsible for their actions, and therefore to deny Christian understandings of sin as purposeful disobedience.[73] If humans were not morally responsible, then there could be no divine judgment; socialism required that all 'give up our belief in the Bible' and 'give up all our hopes of heaven and fears of hell'.[74] Further, in denying that humans were 'accountable and responsible both to God and man', socialists also denied the necessity of 'Divine grace'.[75] According to J.F. Winks, in denying the 'doctrine of man's responsibility to God and his fellows', socialists were dissolving 'the firm rock, on which every principle of morality, virtue, and religion must be built'.[76] Socialist arguments about the formation of character, optimism about the possibilities of cooperation, and a social analysis which attributed worldly evils only to irrational social organisation were also perceived to entail the denial of Original Sin.[77] It is easy to see why some Christians would be repelled by claims, such as that of James 'Elishama' Smith in an editorial in the *Crisis*, that by abolishing 'the system of individual property…, both original sin and all actual transgressions might be banished from human nature, and human society'.[78] Or by Samuel Austin's rejection of Original Sin as 'a false and abominable libel upon human nature, and upon the God of

[72] *NMW*, no.4, 174, 'Preaching and Practice' (24 February 1838), 141-2.
[73] Lockley, 'Christian Doubt and Hope in Early Socialism', 367–68.
[74] Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, *Socialism*, 8–9.
[75] Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 6.
[76] Winks, *Christianity and Not Owenism*, 9.
[77] These disagreements have often been noted by scholars of socialism, who observe variously that there was 'little place' for the 'old notions of original sin' in the 'grand scheme for the perfectibility of man', that Owenite social theory 'excluded' or was actively '*directed against* the Calvinist picture of original sin'. Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 23; Stedman Jones, 'Utopian Socialism Reconsidered', 118; Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism' [my italics].
[78] *Crisis,* no.3, 10, 'Weekly Proceedings…' (2 November 1833), 73.

nature'.[79] Or by an anonymous writer in the *New Moral World* that the 'Mosaic' idea that 'man is bad by nature' was the 'real Devil of the human race'.[80] While Owenites argued that it was the competitive economic system which caused poverty, unemployment, and economic instability, the 'priesthood of the world' attributed these maladies to the innate propensity of humans to vice.[81] And if it were the case that humans had such an irrepressible propensity to evil, then this would prove that humans were not capable of fruitfully cooperating and that human character was not highly plastic. These perceived disagreements between the socialist and Christian accounts of human character were a recurrent feature of debates between Owenites and Christian anti-socialists.[82]

It would be misleading, however, to describe such disagreements about Original Sin or responsibility as taking place between Owenites and 'Christianity'. Owenite views on Original Sin would have been entirely unobjectionable for Unitarians, while their account of environmental determinism has some sympathies with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.[83] Instead, and more precisely, the disputes arose between Owenites and advocates of one particular form of Anglican theology. Further, these advocates understood the enduring influence and acceptance of these doctrinal claims as not only a theological matter, but also as central to the preservation of Christian virtue and the survival of the social order.[84] It is only in light of this relationship between theological truth, Christian piety, and social stability that the ferocity of these disputes can be understood.

Accounts of Owenite socialism as conferring particular importance on anti-religious campaigning often grant prominence to figures such as Charles Southwell and G.J. Holyoake.[85] Both were prominent in the movement and worked as social missionaries, and both were also involved in varying

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[79] *NMW*, no.1, 31, 'Association of All Classes of All Nations…' (30 May 1835), 241.
[80] *NMW*, no.1, 4, 'Hints for the Formation of an Association' (22 November 1834), 26.
[81] *NMW*, no.1, 4, 'Hints for the Formation of an Association' (22 November 1834), 26.
[82] They also prompted disagreements a series of other subjects, including the possibilities of scientific progress and the relationship between population and food production. There were also related disagreements about whether Owenites were unduly materialist, focusing only upon 'the outward man – the mere organisation - whereas, all efficient methods for reforming human nature should begin at the heart...The foundation of character is the heart. From thence are the issues of life.' Roebuck, *Rev. J.H. Roebuck's Lectures. No. I*, 40.
[83] It was common for Owenites to gleefully cite the apparent authority of Calvinist theologians in support of their account of character formation. See, for example, *NMW* no.6, 49, 'Objections and Answers – Article I' (28 September 1839), 774; *NMW* no.9, 5, 'Mr. Brindley and Socialism' – 'The Norfolk and Norwich Monitor' (30 January 1841), 68; Bailey, *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*, 195–98.
[84] Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*.
[85] See, for example, Frow and Frow, *The New Moral World*.

kinds of anti-religious or anti-Christian activity. They were each imprisoned for blasphemy in the early 1840s, and while Holyoake established the Secularist movement, Southwell became a popular atheist lecturer.[86] Accounts of anti-religiosity as central to the movement therefore appeal to both Southwell and Holyoake as important figures, and they highlight the extent to which Holyoake was able to lead the rump of the socialist movement into his newly formed Secularism. Yet, in Southwell's case it is unclear whether he was ever really a socialist at all. Southwell was a political entrepreneur, who had worked as a freethought lecturer in London in the 1830s before his appointment as a social missionary in 1840. While he was interested in improving the material conditions of working people, he denied the doctrine of circumstances and his arguments were those of the radical libertarian fulminating against authority rather than the socialist.[87] After the Central Board adopted a more officially conciliatory stance and socialists came increasingly to identify themselves as 'Rational Religionists', Southwell resigned as a social missionary in 1841 to pursue a belligerent campaign against Christianity. He founded a penny weekly, the *Oracle of Reason*, which railed against Christianity and popularised materialist science, before being convicted for blasphemy in 1842 and serving a year in prison.[88] An Anti-Persecution Union was established to support Southwell (and Holyoake, who had also been imprisoned), while the *Oracle* denounced the 'milk-and-water, namby pamby infidelity' of some Owenites and demanded a more pugilistic stance against Christianity, a position shared by several social missionaries including Margaret Chappellsmith.[89] By 1844, Southwell was no longer aligned with Owenite socialism, and was working as an atheist lecturer.[90]

G.J. Holyoake was a less belligerent agitator and a more successful organiser than Southwell. Although less pugilistic, he was similarly consumed with the 'religious question'.[91] He established the 'Secularist'

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[86] Holyoake was sentenced to six months in Gloucester gaol in August 1842 for remarks he made about the place of religion in socialist communities.
[87] Desmond, 'Artisan Resistance and Evolution in Britain', 86; Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 71.
[88] Desmond, 'Artisan Resistance and Evolution in Britain', 82–86. Other similar weeklies included Henry Hetherington's *Free-Thinker's Information for the People* (1842-43), Southwell's *Investigator!* (1843), and Holyoake's *Movement* (1843-4).
[89] Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism*, 9; 47–48.
[90] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 78–90. Southwell lived an eventful life. In his later years, Charles Southwell emigrated to Melbourne, led a campaign against local landowners, failed to win election to Victoria's first Legislative Council, and then found employment playing Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. A theatre tour then took him to New Zealand, where he denounced the impact of the alliance between Maori Protestants and the Anglican Church on the opportunities of white settlers, becoming 'New Zealand's most violent racist'. Secord, 'Southwell, Charles (1814–1860), Freethinker and Journalist'; Stenhouse, 'Imperialism, Atheism, and Race', 754–55.
[91] Yeo, 'G. J. Holyoake (1807–1906)', 63.

movement, a less confrontational and more respectable alternative to either Southwell's atheism or early forms of militant 'infidelity'. While emphasising similar themes, such as hostility to superstition and celebration of reason, Secularists also recognised that the existence of a natural religious impulse required the establishment of a substitute for religion. Most importantly, the Secularist movement also adopted some of the central ideas of Owenism about the environmental formation of character, the injustice of retributive punishment, and the importance of education. However, they sought to reimagine these ideas as a 'philosophy for individuals as well as for society', creating an ideology of self-help in which individuals' were also able to transform their own natures. In virtue of this inheritance of the 'ideas, buildings and membership of the old Rational Society', Secularism was the 'the direct heir of Socialism'. The continuity between the two movements is striking:

> In Stockport and Sheffield the local Socialists kept their Halls of Science open and when Holyoake started the Secularist movement, they simply transferred their allegiance. In Leicester and Northampton, the same men were leaders of Secularism in the 1860s as had led the Socialists twenty years earlier…The continuity from Socialism to Secularism is particularly marked in Manchester. When the Hall of Science closed down, Southwell led a revival in 1849 and reopened it. When it closed again the following year, and a smaller Social Institution was acquired, an address from Robert Owen was read at the opening, and when Cooper lectured there in 1852 he recognised many old faces in the audience. This Social Institution became a Secular Institution by changing nothing except its name.[92]

Accounts of Owenism as having 'created the organised movement of Secularism' or of Secularism as the 'development of, and principal heir to, socialism' suggest that anti-religious activity was central to Owenite socialism.[93] They imply not merely that Charles Southwell or G.J. Holyoake were the natural inheritors of the legacy of Owenite socialism, but that the emergence of Secularism reveals something essential which had long been gestating within the movement. Such claims are especially dubious in the case of Southwell, whose commitment to the movement was only ever ambivalent and whose subsequent atheist agitation contained few traces of his former, nominal identification as a socialist.

[92] Royle, *Radical Politics*, 51–52.
[93] Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 298; Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 182.

More broadly, however, I think it is a mistake to assume that because the Secularist movement arose from the ruins of socialism, anti-religious agitation was therefore the true heart of socialism *all along*. This is for two reasons. The first reason is the rise of Secularism was the result of Holyoake's effective political entrepreneurship, adopting some of the language and arguments of socialism, but re-purposing them into a more individualistic packaging. The second reason is that the 'Secularist' movement should not be conflated with more contemporary understandings of secularism. Far from seeking to limit the range of questions upon which religion should be seen as an influence, Holyoake's 'Secularism' included a positive, affirmative role for God and for the natural religious impulse.

In Section 2.1.2, I have noted that scholars have often identified Owenite socialism as determinedly anti-religious. I described a 'Paine-Carlile' tradition in which Owenites have often been placed, but argued that doing so conceals how the religious thought of Owenites was grounded in their own socialist philosophy. I noted that debates between Owenites and anti-socialist Christians were common, but argued that these should be seen as reflecting a disagreement not between Owenites and 'Christianity' but between Owenites and one particular theological outlook. I then noted that accounts of Owenism as anti-religious lean too heavily upon Charles Southwell and upon G.J. Holyoake's establishment of Secularism, and I argued that these figures should not be understood as reflecting the broad character of the movement.

2.1.3 Owenites as Borrowing from the Christian Tradition

In Section 2.1.3, I describe how scholars of Owenism have often identified these socialists as having borrowed from, or shared features with, the Christian tradition. I note that Owenites used scriptural quotations as 'proof texts', adopted the use of hymns, and dispatched social 'missionaries' across the country. I also suggest more tentatively that one might see Owenites as having adopted structures of thought from the Christian tradition. However, I also note that scholars disagree about the reasons why Owenites adopted practices or ideas from contemporary Christianity. To focus the discussion, I then discuss three ways in which Owenites have been understood as borrowing from, or sharing an

affinity with, Christianity, in virtue of their millennialism (Section 2.1.3.1), sectarianism (Section 2.1.3.2), or relationship to Protestant communalism (Section 2.1.3.3).

It has also been argued that Owenites borrowed practices, language, or structures of thought from contemporary Christians. Given the pervasiveness of Christian ideas, rhetoric, and institutions, this would not be surprising. Christian cultural influence extended beyond those who actively participated in worship; even '[c]hildren whose parents seldom attended church still learnt prayers at their mother's knee, heard grace said at meals, sang hymns with their parents, went to Sunday School, and very often to a denominational day school'.[94] Scripture provided a template of how to write and think about the world. Radicals offered political arguments couched in a rhetoric of 'loss, struggle, and redemption [which] was often taken directly from the Bible itself, a text whose narrative forms provided a readily accessible and familiar language of desire'.[95] Even the irreligious were biblically literate.[96] Theological considerations were often implicit in the conduct of seeming unrelated debates. Discussions about demography or about economic interventionist took place within a web of assumptions about sin and divine order.[97] Attempts to better understand the natural world were always perceived to also have implications for one's understanding of God's nature.

The Owenite borrowing from Christian culture included the use of scriptural quotations and biblical references to support socialist arguments. This language could be used to celebrate and legitimate Owenite goals, by showing scriptural endorsement, or to bolster social critique, identifying the divine disfavour for features of society which Owenites condemned as irrational and harmful. For example, in a lecture delivered at the Salford Social Institution and then published as a tract entitled 'Community the Only Salvation for Man', Harry Howells Horton declared that community was 'the only heaven we can reasonably look forward to, - the only real and substantial salvation' and argued that poverty was the 'only true Devil'.[98] Socialism promised the '*redemption* of man from the present demoralizing, sickening, soul-harrowing influences, of old society'.[99] James Elishama Smith could pronounce in a

[94] McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 15.
[95] Vernon, 'Who's Afraid of the "Linguistic Turn"?', 93.
[96] Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 3; Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*.
[97] Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*; Pullen, 'Malthus' Theological Ideas'.
[98] Horton, *Community the Only Salvation for Man*, 14; 20.
[99] *Working Bee* no.1, 10, 'Religious Socialism' (8 August 1840), 77 [my italics].

sermon 'On the Evils of Competition' that 'the true meaning of [the word] devil is envy, or jealousy, or strife, or competition; it means a spirit of strife and contention'.[100] Lectures would often be modelled upon sermons, with focus upon a 'proof text', a scriptural quotation to which a speaker could appeal in expounding their argument.[101] At other times, scriptural quotation would frequently be used by Owenites to counsel endurance amidst persecution or to inspire confidence that good or wisdom would triumph.[102] Owenite appropriation from the Christian Church extended beyond language, to include also practices such as Social Hymns, a Social Bible, Social 'missionaries', ceremonies and rites such as baptisms, funerals, and weddings, and festivals which mimicked those of the Christian calendar, such as celebrations to mark Christmas and Easter.[103] Each represents a facet of Owenite social life and culture which was borrowed from Christianity.

In addition to the adoption of scriptural language or conventionally religious practices, one might also suggest that Owenites inherited, either consciously or unconsciously, Christian categories of thought or ways of thinking. These might have included pre-theoretical assumptions, about whether history has a purpose or how change might occur, which endure as structures of thought despite the removal of substantive theological content.[104] Such structures of thought might be tied to the use of religious language in different ways. The relationship might be *causal*, with the socialist adoption of millennialist language encouraging an expectation of imminent and dramatic political change. It might be that such language *reflects* the endurance of mental frameworks. Or it might be that the intentional adoption of religious language in order to advance socialist goals is simply *unconnected* to unreflective pre-theoretical

[100] *Crisis*, no.4, 2, 'Weekly Proceedings…' (19 April 1834), 9.
[101] See, for example, Arthur S. Wade's lecture from Isaiah 6:33 ('Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure'), John Rabone's lecture from Genesis 45:24 ('See that ye fall not out by the way') to the Birmingham Branch of the National Equitable Labour Exchange, or Robert Owen's own lectures based upon the texts of St. Paul on charity. *Crisis*, no.1, 30 'Review: A Voice from the Church' (22 September 1832), 115; *Crisis*, no.2, 27 'Weekly Proceedings…' (13 July 1833), 211; *Crisis*, no.2, 31&32, 'Extract of a Lecture…' – 'A Member of the Council' (10 August 1833), 252.
[102] See, for example, *Crisis*, no.1, 22, 'To the Readers of the Crisis' – John Rabone (4 August 1832), 86.
[103] Fraser, 'Robert Owen and the Workers', 95; Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 98–103. There was even discussion as to whether singing hymns standing up was to corrupt the 'worship of Truth' by mixing it with the 'rites of the Church'. Instead, 'there is a better example in the Unitarians, who sit throughout their worship, [and] we should suggest they may be rather made the guide of our service in this respect.' *Working Bee* no.1, 29, 'The Rites of Social Worship' – Amicus (19 December 1840), 230.
[104] There is a question about whether these are 'religious' ways of thinking simply because they were inherited from Christianity or instead because of a deeper quality of religiosity which happens to be shared with contemporary Christianity. However, entering into discussion of this knotty question would distract me from the question at hand.

assumptions. To note, one might have doubts about whether language can be detached in this way and used in a merely rhetorical manner. Such doubts might be principled, about whether language always carries with it implicit understandings or assumptions about how terms are related and therefore about how the world works, or practical, as to whether this is the case in this instance.

Accounts of Owenite thought as including assumptions or frameworks borrowed from Christian thought have tended to focus upon Robert Owen. William Stafford speculates that Owen's view that the individual pursuit of self-interest harmoniously conduces to the good of others might be 'an afterecho of religious ways of thinking; the good God could not have created a world in which conflict and disharmony are part of the basic order of things; they exist only as results of sin and error'.[105] Stafford also identifies a 'Manichean frame of mind' which reflects the endurance of a 'hidden substructure of religious ways of apprehending experience'. On Stafford's account, it is these structures of thought which encourage Owen to expect total social transformation, and to repudiate the present as wholly corrupt. Anja Finger argues that 'Owen's idea of progress was strongly inspired by his religious imagination', although he 'emptied religious language of its content by connecting it to political agitation'.[106] Gareth Stedman Jones is more precise about the source of these assumptions, arguing that Owen's 'basic assumptions about the millennium, truth, politics, determinism, and moral perfectionism' are borrowed from Rational Dissenters such as William Godwin and Joseph Priestley.[107] This included beliefs about truth unfolding providentially through time to bring greater consensus and moral perfection or about scientific progress as heralding dramatic social change, beliefs which appear with 'modifications and reformulations' and 'shorn of their explicitly Christian reference' in Owen's thought.[108] These assumptions then help to explain, on Stedman Jones's account, some prominent features of Owen's thought: his indifference to particular forms of government, his scepticism about democracy, his attribution of a marginal role to human agency in bringing about

[105] Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism, and Nostalgia*, 191.
[106] Finger, 'The Pains and Pleasures of Opium, Religion, and Modernity', 151.
[107] Stedman Jones, 'Millennium and Enlightenment', 13. This vision of the relationship between science and the millennium, grounded in an interpretation of Daniel seems to have been popular among Puritan reformers during the mid-seventeenth century. This then waned with the Restoration, and during the eighteenth century, it was more common to see Daniel as referring to an increase in more narrowly *religious* knowledge. Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 109–10; 124–25.
[108] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 183–84.

social change, his providential sense of the laws of nature, and his belief in the significance of his "science".[109]

The identification of structures of thought borrowed from the Christian tradition is not limited to Owen himself. One might look, for example, to the existence of Owenite theodicy. In the Christian tradition, theodicy is the attempt to understand and reckon with the existence of evil in a world governed by God. For Owenites, there is a need for socialist theodicy in order to explain why, given the possibility of a harmony of interests and the obvious benefits of cooperative social arrangements, the world is currently so wracked with vice, error, and pain. Socialist and Christian theodicy both seek to answer the question of why, given the existence of transformative powers, there is, and has been, such an unhappiness in the world. Charles Bray, in his 1841 *Philosophy of Necessity* reckons with this question, arguing that if all material wants had been provided for and all spiritual truths revealed, then there would have been no motive to physical and mental effort, and therefore no impetus to personal growth.[110] Similarly, 'X' in the *New Moral World* argues that suffering exists because it provides a 'divine system of discipline…employed to goad him [man] onward in the up-hill path of improvement, and to bring into generous exercise the latent sympathies that lie buried in his breast'.[111] Abram Combe notes the pressing need for an Owenite theodicy, but was not content with the available arguments in the way that Charles Bray and X were. Combe argues that 'Ignorance' has been the cause of all social ills and is the enemy of 'Nature', but notes that it remains a 'mystery which as yet we are unable to solve' why 'Ignorance was originally produced'.[112] Each of Bray, X, and Combe recognise the need for a socialist theodicy, an account of how social evils endure in a world in which solutions are so accessible, a form of thought which is common in Christian apologetics.

Although there is broad agreement *that* Owenites borrowed certain ideas, forms of expression, or structures of thought from contemporary Christianity, there is disagreement about *why* they did so.[113] Was this an active and conscious attempt to appropriate 'what they considered useful elements from

[109] Stedman Jones, 'Millennium and Enlightenment', 13; 16.
[110] Bray, *The Philosophy of Necessity*.
[111] *NMW*, no.6, 41, 'On the Existence of Moral Evil…' - X (3 August 1839), 646.
[112] Combe, 'Metaphorical Sketches of the Old and New Systems', 284–85.
[113] An additional complexity is introduced when one considers that any particular borrowing might have been understood in different and conflicting ways by different Owenites, whether as sincere, satirical, or strategic.

the enemy's armoury', 'a useful means of drawing away adherents from the various Christian churches'?[114] Was it a response to the 'needs of the rank and file', who yearned for the activities and community provided by churches?[115] Or is it explained by their 'inability to conceive of new ideologies which do not follow the patterns of the old; perhaps with attenuated or transformed gods, perhaps with echoes of the old cults and rituals'?[116] By the absence of alternative ways of 'conceptualizing and describing social reform which was deeply personal and intensely moralistic', reflecting 'an intensity of aspiration for which there was simply no secular vocabulary available – an imaginative straining towards future freedom which found voice in the only language of social optimism possessed by most men and women'?[117] Or by the sheer cultural dominance of nineteenth-century Christianity, which shaped the language and activities of even its staunchest critics?[118] These conflicting explanations each have different implications of one's understanding of the movement. If Owenite borrowing from contemporary Christianity is a strategic response to the needs of members, then this implies a separation between central, calculating Owenites committed to an especially secular philosophy and ordinary members suspicious of irreligion and craving the comforts of a church. Or if the Owenite adoption of religious language is merely a function of the social standing of Christianity, then this might be a reflection upon the wider context, in which Christian styles of expression or modes of thought continued to be resonant, rather than upon socialism in particular.

2.1.3.1 Millennialism

In Section 2.1.3.1, I note that Robert Owen and the Owenites have often been described by scholars as 'millennialists'. I argue that the use of this category has been unhelpful. It is a complex term which is used vaguely and so it is often unclear what is being described. Further, when it is used to characterise an attitude towards change, it carries connotations about the emotional and psychological explanations of that attitude which are speculative and misleading. Finally, the use of the category tends to distract

[114] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 98; Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"', 25.
[115] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 93–101.
[116] Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 127.
[117] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 160.
[118] Larsen, *A People of One Book*.

from other religious influences and to imply that religious influences in general are hostile to the development of mature politics. This section does not raise a principled objection to the use of the category of 'millennialism'. Instead I argue that, in practice, the category is often used vaguely, that it evokes speculative psychological explanations, and that it tends to distract from other religious influences which are more conducive to political thought.

Robert Owen and the Owenites are often described with the vocabulary of millennialism. Owen was a 'millennial prophet, a 'millennialist', an example of the 'revival of various millennial expectations' who had a 'millennial' conception of the future.[119] There was a 'definite strain of millennialism' in Owen's understanding of society as 'doomed to disaster' and his messianic vision of himself as 'lead[ing] man into a New World.[120] Owenism more broadly had a 'millenarian' or 'millennial' dimension.[121] Communities such as Orbiston and New Harmony had a strong 'millenarian' aspect, 'developed millenarian and ecstatic tendencies' or represented 'millenarianism'.[122] Although New Harmony was 'purely secular', it shared the tradition of 'millenarian religious bodies'.[123] There was a 'millennial note' in Owenite journals, which were '[i]mbued with the discourse of secularised millenarianism' and which reflected a 'millenarian' or 'quasi-millenarian perfectionism'.[124] Millennialism was 'secularized in socialism'.[125] Even those who argue that this did not embody a 'literal faith in millenarian change', maintain that a description as 'millennialist' aids our understanding of Owenism.[126] Owenites themselves did invoke Christian eschatology and included overt references to the Millennium; a stone in the hall at Queenwood was inscribed with the letters 'CM' to indicate that the completion of the hall's construction marked the commencement of the millennium.[127] Yet, it is rarely clear what these descriptions mean.

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[119] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 161; Oliver, 'Owen in 1817: The Millennialist Moment'; James, 'Recent Tendencies in the History of Political Thought', 397; Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 182.
[120] Rexroth, *Communalism: From Its Origins to the Twentieth Century*, 221–22.
[121] Harrison, 'A New View of Mr Owen', 3; 9; Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 87–126.
[122] Fraser, *Alexander Campbell and the Search for Socialism*, 21; Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*; Taylor, *Visions of Harmony*.
[123] Rexroth, *Communalism: From Its Origins to the Twentieth Century*, 217.
[124] Armytage, *Heavens Below*, 141; Siméon, *Robert Owen's Experiment at New Lanark*, 7; Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 2; 19.
[125] Garrett, 'Swedenborg and the Mystical Enlightenment', 69–74; 81.
[126] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 160.
[127] Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, 118.

The category of 'millennialism' conceals considerable complexity. It refers to a belief that divine agency would imminently bring about the end of the world, a belief which dates to early Christianity but had become particularly ubiquitous in early nineteenth-century Britain. Contemporary events, such as the December 1825 financial crash or the outbreak of cholera in 1832, were widely interpreted as portents of the imminent apocalypse.[128] Protestant Britain was identified with Israel, a nation chosen to defeat the Antichrist, first Catholic France and subsequently Napoleon.[129] These interpretations relied upon strict scripturalism, with biblical passages painstakingly parsed for references to contemporary events while significant biblical numbers (such as the twelve tribes of Israel or the ten horns of the red dragon in Revelation) were used to calculate when future events would occur. Beliefs about the relevance of scriptural prophecy to contemporary events and the imminence of the apocalypse were just 'part and parcel of everyday evangelical religion' in early nineteenth-century Britain.[130] These beliefs were not just held by marginal, prophetic figures like Joanna Southcott or John Wroe, but also by respected luminaries like poet and critic Matthew Arnold.[131] Edward Irving was a Scottish minister who became a minor celebrity with his declarations of the imminence of the apocalypse. This was a framework within which traumatic events could be interpreted and understood as bearing divine meaning, while careful scriptural exegesis could be used to predict the imminent, dramatic change.

It includes 'pre-millennialists', who maintained that the messiah's return would precede the millennium, and post-millennialists, who believed that this return would follow the millennialism.[132] This difference caused divergent outlooks. Pre-millennialists argued that one could only wait for divine intervention. By contrast, post-millennialists insisted that human progress would precipitate the millennium, and so pursued the goal of moral improvement through the active proselytization of Bible Societies.[133] Often, they also argued that this moral improvement could be stimulated by allowing the 'natural' activity of the market to exert a morally disciplining influence upon the profligate and vicious.

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[128] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 35–36; Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 130–32.
[129] Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, 227; McGinn, *Antichrist*, 242–44.
[130] Harrison, *The Second Coming*, 5.
[131] Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 35–46.
[132] Some describe pre-millennialists as 'millenarians', reserving the term 'millennialist' for post-millennialists. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*.
[133] Lockley, *Visionary Religion and Radicalism*, 6–22. David Bebbington argues that post-millennialism was the 'characteristic eschatology of the Enlightenment', while pre-millennialism was 'that typical of Romanticism'. Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism and British Culture', 110.

By contrast, pre-millennialists tended to argue that such hopes of moral reform were presumptuous. Instead, people should be made more comfortable while they awaited the Second Coming.[134] There were also disagreements as to how one would know when the millennium would come, whether through immediate inspiration or scriptural interpretation, and whether this change was to be evolutionary or disruptive.[135]

The complexity of the concept of 'millennialism' makes it unclear how informative the descriptions above really are. 'Millennialism' embraces a wide range of understandings of the way in which humans could participate in the coming of the Millennium, which might variously have politically empowering or neutering implications.[136] The Millennium itself might be a literal event of divine irruption which realises scriptural prophecy or an internal process of transformation.[137] It is consistently unclear whether characterisations as 'millennialist' are intended to refer to the process or (also) the end of change, or whether they are intended metaphorically, as referring to the anticipation of imminent change, or more substantively, including claims about divine influence or the end of secular time. And if the characterisation is merely intended to communicate an expectation of imminent and dramatic change, then it seems unhelpful to use a term with such extraordinary conceptual baggage. Millennialism is an expansive concept which is used in such a vague manner that it is unclear what descriptive or interpretative work that it can perform.

I have two further objections to the focus upon millennialism. The first objection is that millennialism is a concept which does not merely describe an attitude towards change, but rather is freighted with implications about the supposed psychological causes of that attitude. The objection is that using the language of millennialism evokes a number of undue speculative psychological explanations about the emotional roots of that orientation towards change. The second objection is that a focus upon millennialism, to the exclusion of other religious influences and challenges, creates the impression that religious influences offer a barrier to the development of mature politics. This is the case because

[134] Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 8–18.
[135] Lockley, *Visionary Religion and Radicalism*, 19–23; Oliver, 'Owen in 1817: The Millennialist Moment', 182–85.
[136] Lockley, *Visionary Religion and Radicalism*.
[137] Garrett, 'Swedenborg and the Mystical Enlightenment'.

millennialism is associated with both indifference to rational objections and with a failure to measure the requisite practical means to achieve one's goals.

First, the concept of millennialism not only suggests the existence of an attitude to change, but also carries implications about the psychological roots of that attitude. For example, millennialism is commonly presented as a psychological mechanism which allows one to cope with convulsive social conditions. Millennialism arises as a response to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, offering consolation and confidence at times of rapid social change.[138] J.F.C. Harrison explains millennialism as attractive because it offered 'a framework within which the dislocation caused by the social and political changes of early industrialism in England, the Revolution in France, and expansion in America could all be related'.[139] Millennialism served as a coping mechanism to deal with the social disruption of early industrialism. Another psychological explanation of millennialism is that it arises from a feeling of desperation and impotence.[140] Owenites 'faced seemingly insuperable barriers' in a world without popular suffrage and in which there were no realistic prospects of gradual change; they, therefore resorted to a 'millennial leap of faith'.[141] Conversely, when those prospects of change did improve later in the century, millennialism waned as a cultural phenomenon. E.P. Thompson also attributes Owenite millennialism to the absence of opportunities to achieve change, although he identifies the circular logic of the doctrine of circumstances as the culprit. If individual character was the product of circumstances then in order to transform character one must first change circumstances. Yet, the circumstances could be transformed only by those who had already had their character changed. One must 'either despair or proclaim a secular chiliasm'.[142] Gradual change was ruled out, and

[138] Norman Cohn argues that millennialism offers a framework for 'collective efforts to cope with situations of strain or conflict', emerging from a 'situation of peculiar strain' which 'arouses not only the rational anxieties of the adult but also anxieties springing from the forgotten experiences of infancy'. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 309–11. Similar arguments about disorientation and insecurity are offered by J.F.C. Harrison and Judith Wolfe. Harrison, *The Second Coming*; Wolfe, 'Eschatology'.
[139] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 100; 77.
[140] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 877.
[141] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 161.
[142] This was the subject of the third thesis on Feuerbach: 'The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself.' Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', 172.

transformation could be achieved only in 'the sudden change of heart, the millenarial leap'.[143] Millennialism is not merely a neutral description of the expectation of imminent change. Instead, it includes connotations about the social conditions or psychological pathologies which have evoked that expectation. It implies that this expectation is not to be justified with reasons, but to be explained as an expression of despair or a way of coping with change.

The second objection is that a focus upon millennialism distracts from the other religious influences, challenges, and concerns of the movement, and creates the impression that religious influences offer an obstacle to a mature, reasoned engagement with politics. Focus upon millennialism creates such an impression because millennialism implies an imperviousness to rational critique and the absence of a practical strategy to achieve one's goals. Millennialism is often described as 'rooted in an absolute confidence that their theories were economically, politically and morally true' or as a source of boundless hope.[144] Millennialism therefore suggests an incapacity to engage with rational objections or challenges. Gareth Stedman Jones identifies the existence of a religious character in Owenite socialism which was attributable to an 'expectation…of apocalyptic change, of 'the last days' or of the imminent fall of Anti-Christ'. He argues that the 'most important' way in which 'the religious origins of socialism continue[d] to affect its subsequent character' was in 'the place assigned by socialism to politics', in the 'relegation of politics to a subordinate or derivative status'. In virtue of this millennialist attitude, the 'relationship of socialism with politics was strictly instrumental' and '[d]ifferent constitutions or forms of government were therefore of interest to socialists only in as far as they offered the means to forward this end'.[145] Further, as noted in the previous paragraph, millennialism

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[143] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 865. W.H. Oliver argues in a similar way that this logic, according to which individuals could transform circumstances only when they had themselves been altered by those same circumstances, required that Owen confer on himself the status of a deity. Oliver, 'Owen in 1817: The Millennialist Moment'. To note, it is unclear that such an experience of impotence does characterise the condition of Owenites. Many saw the contemporary world as deeply fragile and understood themselves to possess a clear strategy for the achievement of change. Instead of an absence of plausible mechanisms of change, there was a surfeit, with disputes between those who believed that an experiment would prove the merits of the system and prompt imitation by others, just as steam power or the railway had been adopted when their value was proven, or whether instead the movement should pursue more gradual recruitment and branch activity.

[144] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 100–104; Siméon, *Robert Owen's Experiment at New Lanark*, 95.

[145] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 187. The question of why a 'religious' politics should lack an interest in institutions and government is especially puzzling given that the project of secularism, which concerns the separation of religion and politics, has historically been a matter of Christian theological debates around the function and nature of the state, and about the allocation of power between the spiritual and temporal. See Berlinerblau, 'Political Secularism'.

is often understood as arising from the absence of practical means to achieve one's goals, as emerging from imagination of change without the articulation of the mechanisms for its achievement. Focusing upon millennialism distracts from the other religious influences upon Owenite socialism, and promotes a conception of religious forms of imagination as hostile to the development of mature politics.

2.1.3.2 Owenism as (akin to) a Sect

In Section 2.1.3.2, I describe how Owenites have been described by scholars as adopting the form of the 'sect' from the Christian tradition. Just as with characterisations of Owenite socialists as 'millennialists', I argue that descriptions of Owenites as 'sectarian' are frequently misleading. To describe a movement as a 'sect' implies that the nature of their activities, ultimate goals, and ethos are all explained by their being a sect. It suggests that evidence that they organised a calendar of social activities, also shows that they renounced the goal of social transformation in favour of isolation and seclusion. Yet, while Owenites did organise their own social institutions, they were not seeking to withdraw from, but rather to transform, the world, and to describe Owenites as 'sectarian' conceals this important fact.

A further sense in which, it is argued, Owenites adopted features from contemporary Christianity is in reference to their adoption of the form of the 'sect' to organise their activities. Often, accounts suggest that Owenites came to organise themselves as a sect as a response to the failure of previous attempts at social transformation. The story goes that after the failure of New Harmony, Owen returned from the United States in 1828 to discover a movement which shared some of his aims and was, to some extent, inspired by him. This movement was concerned with trade unionism and political reform, enjoying a large membership and significant support among the working classes. This movement established co-operative stores, organised the first national union which included workers from rival trades, and founded a National Equitable Labour Exchange which sought to establish a parallel currency of 'labour notes'. These activities were all nominally part of a strategy for the establishment of intentional communities and therefore for economic transformation, and they each enjoyed

widespread interest and appeal. Yet, many historians have argued, the failure of the Exchange in 1833 and the GNCTU in 1834 prompted Owenites to withdraw from the immediate pursuit of widespread social change.[146] Instead, according to A.L. Morton, they 'continue[d] as a sect, active and lively, but outside the main stream of working-class life', becoming 'more abstract and remote from reality'.[147] On G.D.H. Cole's account, after 1834, Owenism became a 'sect':

> I use the word "sect" advisedly; for during these years the Owenites were really ceasing to be concerned mainly with Socialism or economic change, and developing into a sect apart with a social religion of their own. In all the towns where they were strong, they erected their own buildings. At first these were often called "Social Institutions," in imitation of Owen's lnstitution in London; but soon the name "Hall of Science" came to be preferred, and the buildings became in effect "Rational Churches," forerunners of the Ethical Churches of more recent times.[148]

Gregory Claeys suggests the same chronology and the same explanation, identifying 1835-45 as the 'sectarian' phase of Owenism and arguing that their renewed focus upon withdrawing from the old immoral world was a result of the failure of their industrial activism.[149] J.F.C. Harrison offers a similar periodisation: in '1833-34 socialism was associated with turn-outs, mass demonstrations and hostility to competitive economy: by 1840 it was referred to as a rapidly growing sect which challenged established religion and encouraged immoral practices'.[150] They were a sect 'in its general sense of a small religious group, in which membership is voluntary and limited to persons having certain special convictions or experiences in common' and whose members eschew participation in wider society.[151] As well as sharing these formal features, Harrison argues that 'adherence to Owenism can be explained

[146] See, for example, Taylor, 'Explaining the Origins of Socialism', 396.
[147] Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen*, 46–48.
[148] Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 297–98.
[149] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 125.
[150] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 217. R.B. Rose opts for a different nomenclature and chronology. R.B. Rose characterises the movement not as a 'sect', but as a 'cult'. And he describes the 'cult' as emerging with the movement's April 1839 adoption of the moniker 'The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists'. Rose, 'John Finch', 174. Conversely, Tom Scriven argues that it was the entry of Freethinkers and infidels into the movement in the 1820s which transformed Owenism from what had 'once been a quasi-sect' to something 'on the way to becoming a mass movement'. Scriven, *Popular Virtue*, 20–22.
[151] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 135.

in the same terms as support for any other contemporary religious sect', offering emotional and intellectual stability in the tumultuous conditions of rapid social change.[152]

Others challenge this account of a dramatic shift around 1834 in which a formerly militant working-class organisation became an 'exclusive classless sect building local activity around the rational religion as a preparation for community life'.[153] Instead, they argue, there was broad consistency throughout the period. Eileen Yeo argues that the 'religion of brotherliness' which Harrison took to typify only later Owenism had always been present 'both in institutional and ideological form' in the movement.[154] According to Edward Royle, although the movement's 'sectarian characteristics became even more pronounced' as the mass membership of the GNCTU fell away, these 'sectarian' features had always typified an organisation which had 'always had the characteristics of a religious body'. Although Owen's 'followers drew in on themselves to preserve their purity from the world', acquiring buildings and organising autonomous organisations, this was a movement which had always been 'similar to' and had drawn 'inspiration from…religious groups like the Shakers and Rappites'.[155] Although these scholars disagree about whether there had been a shift, they do agree that it is fruitful to describe Owenites as a 'sect'.

Harrison's account reflects a central problem with descriptions of Owenism as a 'sect'. This problem is that the description implies a medley of claims about disparate features such as the organisation's activities, ultimate goals, ethos, and the social factors which explain these features. A 'sect' is defined by its separatism and ideological dogmatism. Its members renounce interaction with a corrupted world and have intense personal relationships.[156] A sect forms when, facing persecution or distress, a group

[152] Harrison, 136.
[153] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 87.
[154] Yeo, 87.
[155] Royle, *Radical Politics*, 43. Gregory Claeys also offers a deflationary explanation of seemingly 'sectarian' features, such as the erection of dedicated Owenite buildings and the attempts of Owenite lecturers to acquire Dissenting preaching licenses. He argues that they were an attempt to overcome the difficulty of gaining access to lecturing venues. That is, instead of reflecting anything 'sectarian' about the goals or philosophy of the movement, they were merely a contingent response to the limited availability of lecturing halls. Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"'.
[156] Ernst Troeltsch, in a famous distinction between churches and sects, identified the latter as 'small groups' who 'aspire after personal inward perfection', 'renounc[ing] the idea of dominating the world', and displaying an 'attitude towards the world, the state and society [which] may be indifferent, tolerant or hostile, since they have no desire to control and incorporate these forms of social life'. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 1:331.

seeks to cloister themselves from a hostile and immoral world, forming their own economic and educational institutions. To describe a movement as a 'sect' is therefore to offer a singular description and explanation of the nature of their activities, their goals, and the social conditions to which they respond. It suggests that if a movement is in one sense akin to a sect, then it will be 'sectarian' in other senses. Yet, this produces confused accounts of Owenism. It is not clear, for example, why the Owenite organisation of their own calendar of social activities (one sense in which they have been characterised as 'sectarian') provides any evidence about whether they had renounced the goal of broad social transformation in order to pursue a strategy of isolation (a separate sense in which they could be described as a 'sect'). To draw such an inference about the movement's goals from such social activities is misleading. Yet, this is an inference which is encouraged by a characterisation as a 'sect' because it encourages a singular description and explanation of these separate features. It is an inference which is especially troubling because Owenites were not insular nor did they repudiate participation in wider society. Among their primary activities was the use of 'social missionaries' and the production of journals to popularise their message and recruit new members. And it was in the period 1839-41, when scholars suggest that their sectarian withdrawal was as its zenith, that their journals enjoyed their highest circulation and their lectures were best attended. Local studies suggest that, far from being ideologically rigid and socially exclusive, many Owenites happily participated in Chartism despite the apparent philosophical disagreements between the two movements.[157] According to Eileen Yeo, they organised leisure activities, reading groups, and an alternative social calendar not as part of a retreat from the world but because these were the social spaces in which they could demonstrate the possibility of a new form of life. They were not seeking to withdraw from an ineliminably corrupt world; instead they were moved by a 'heightening feeling of the plasticity of social institutions'.[158] Further, their communities did not offer an escape from the world; they were always founded with the goal of demonstrating the viability of their founding principles, encouraging imitators, and therefore bringing about social transformation. The significance of the misleading inference from an observation about Owenite social activities to an account of a separatist strategy is

[157] Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites'.
[158] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 106.

that it undermines the political seriousness of the movement, conflating the singing of hymns with the abandonment of the goal of social transformation. It implies that the adoption of a 'religious' form of social organisation entails the abnegation of political goals in favour of purity and isolation. To the extent that Owenism embodies sectarian traits, the movement is not committed to serious politics, preferring to denounce and escape injustice rather than to challenge it. Just as with descriptions of 'millennialism', an identification as 'sectarian' implies a refusal to participate in persuasion or dialogue or to reflect upon how that change might be achieved. However, as I will argue in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, the Owenite engagement with religion was precisely concerned with the pursuit and mechanics of societal transformation.

2.1.3.3 Protestant Communalism

In Section 2.1.3.3, I describe a controversy about the extent to which Owenites should be seen as being influenced by or sharing affinities with Protestant communalists such as the Shakers or Rappites. I do not attempt to resolve, but rather to clarify, this disagreement. On one hand are scholars who identify Owenite communitarianism as novel, arguing that the Shakers or Rappites had lacked a philosophical commitment to the establishment of communities. On the other are those who identify continuity between Protestant communalists and Owenite socialists, who each offered appeals to divine intention, and who shared a common discourse of belonging and similar understandings of social change. I note this is a disagreement which is partially factual and partially conceptual. I suggest that different Owenite communities may have differed in the extent to which they shared an affinity with the tradition of Protestant communalism. Finally, I argue that the question of Owenism's relationship to Protestant communalism is further complicated by disagreements about whether socialism is grounded in communitarianism or instead whether communitarianism is an antiquated strain of socialist strategy.

One further question is whether Owenites were influenced by, or shared affinities with, Protestant communalists such as the Shakers, Harmonists, or Rappites. And in what ways were they influenced or were there affinities? Did the Owenite imagination of the establishment of intentional communities,

which they understood as the means and end of socialism, itself owe a debt to Protestant communalists? Was the Owenite valuation of community influenced by, and continuous with, Protestant communalism? Did Owenites actively borrow from the Moravians or Harmonists? Or should we see these groups instead as each drawing upon a common stock of ideas or as each responding to similar challenges? Did Owen 'popularize…in secular form' the ideas of the Shakers?[159] Was this a movement which had always been 'similar to' and had drawn 'inspiration from…religious groups like the Shakers and Rappites'?[160] Further, if there were such influences and affinities, then what would be the implications of this? In part, this might be a question of whether communalism as a form of social organisation can be detached from the theological outlook of radical Protestantism. It might then be possible to view communalism as a common practice shared between Christians concerned with withdrawal into pious seclusion and socialists concerned with social transformation without any further implications about a similarity between those goals. One might also ask whether the influence of Protestant communalism continues to endure in contemporary socialism, whether Owenism serves as a bridge between one strand of radical Protestantism and later socialism, and whether groups such as the Harmonists or Shakers should be regarded as being among the ancestors of socialism. Just as with the previous discussion of millennialism, the question is whether Owenites inherited habits of thought or ways of conceptualising the future which shaped the form and content of their socialism. And just as with the earlier discussion of sectarianism, the question is whether Owenites adopted a model of organisation, or whether they also adopted the conception of the mechanics of social change which had accompanied that model.

Scholars agree that knowledge of, and interest in, Protestant communalism was widespread among Owenite socialists. Often, the example of the Harmonists or the Shakers was cited in Owenite literature in order to claim legitimation and to inspire the imagination.[161] Robert Owen had republished W.S. Warder's account of the Shakers, and when Owen arrived in the United States, he travelled first

[159] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 51.
[160] Royle, *Radical Politics*, 43.
[161] The young Friedrich Engels also cited the Shaker, Harmonist, and Zoarite communities as demonstrating the feasibility of communism, arguing that the success of these communities was despite, and not because of, their religious views. See Leopold, "'All Tell the Same Tale'", 22–44; Leopold, 'Socialist Turnips'.

to visit the Shaker community of Watervliet.[162] The degree of interest is also reflected in the visit of other Owenites, including John Minter Morgan, who visited the Moravian community settlement.[163] Awareness of the workings of these American communities in wider British society was increased by the accounts of Harriet Martineau and James Silk Buckingham. Although references to the communities were scarcer in Owenite literature during much of the 1830s, there was a resurgence in the late 1830s and early 1840s.[164] Letters from John Finch were published in the *New Moral World* which recorded his visits to Brook Farm, to the Harmonists, to the Separatists of Zoar, and to the Mormons, arguing in the same way that Owen did that the success of such communities was in spite, rather than because, of their religious practices.[165] The tales of such communities, which circulated in Owenite journals and in British society more broadly, 'stir[red] what may be identified as the early socialist imagination'.[166] Widespread agreement that Owenites were aware of Protestant communalism, however, sits alongside disagreement about the extent to which their socialist communitarianism was indebted to these forebears.

According to Henry Tam, Owenites were the first communitarians.[167] They were the first to offer a particular set of values, of mutual responsibility, cooperative enquiry, and citizen participation, and proposals for 'new forms of cooperative workplace' and more solidaristic social, political and economic institutions, underlain by positive valuation of interdependence and of reciprocity.[168] In virtue of their emphasis upon interdependence and reciprocity, these stand in contrast with earlier visions of organic unity or collectivism. Tam's identification of the Owenites as the founders of communitarianism is grounded in an account of communitarianism as referring not to separatist, intentional communities. Instead, the concern is with the quality of ethical relations and the institutions necessary to instantiate and promote such relations, with the value of community rather than with the organisations of communities. Tam's account is one which understands communitarianism as an

[162] Lockley, 'Trans-Atlantic Reputations', 191; 197.
[163] Armytage, 'John Minter Morgan's Schemes 1841-1855', 33.
[164] Lockley, 'Trans-Atlantic Reputations', 201.
[165] Lockley, 212.
[166] Lockley, 193.
[167]The term 'communitarianism' was first used by John Goodwyn Barmby in 1841. Garnett, *Co-Operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities*, 24; 38.
[168] Tam, *The Evolution of Communitarian Ideas*, 8–13.

ethical outlook and as a genre of policy proposal. As a result, Tam understands Owenite socialism as the first, original form of communitarianism, as a novel social and political outlook which is discontinuous with earlier ideological and practical projects. Owenite socialism is understood primarily in relation to its future rather than its past.

For different reasons, Barbara Arneil identifies Owenite communitarianism as novel and distinct from earlier traditions, including Protestant communalism. Arneil situates Robert Owen within a history of British domestic 'socialist colonialism' which also includes Charles Booth and the Webbs.[169] Yet, it was a form of 'utopian colonialism' which was distinct from predecessors because it 'was rooted in political, specifically secular socialist ideology rather than religious belief or anarchism'.[170] Owen's home colonisation plan, in contrast to those of liberal counterparts such as Alexis de Tocqueville, was rooted not in 'religion or 'benevolence' but rather 'secularism and socialism'.[171] The colony was a means to preserve a 'radically different way of life and thus challenge the individualist, materialist, and violent capitalist society they lived in, along with the larger world order'.[172] Both Tam's and Arneil's accounts emphasise the existence of an historical disjuncture between Owenite socialists and any precursors. For Tam, the Owenite valuation of mutual responsibility and solidarity contrasted with earlier understandings of organic unity. For Arneil, this caesura is between Owenite 'political, specifically secular socialist ideology' and prior 'religious belief or anarchism'.

G.D.H. Cole also argues that there was no significant continuity between Protestant communalists and Owenite socialists. Cole identifies two key dissimilarities between these groups. First, the Rappites, Shakers, and Zoarites had no principled commitment to communitarianism. They organised communities because they felt themselves to be 'bound together by a narrow bond of religious brotherhood', because this offered the most feasible way of 'holding together till the Day of Judgement' and in order to endure the challenges of frontier life.[173] They 'stood for no general theory of social organisation as a whole'.[174] Second, religious communitarians had no ambition to transform

[169] Arneil, *Domestic Colonies*, 51–56.
[170] Arneil, 193.
[171] Arneil, 198.
[172] Arneil, 236.
[173] Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 97.
[174] Cole, 98.

the world. Instead, they were fleeing religious persecution and seeking the 'withdrawal of a chosen few from the contamination of human wickedness'.[175] By contrast, Owen led a 'revolt…against the evil effects of the new industrialism and the faulty social organisation of the world they were leaving behind', and they sought to teach 'the whole world a new way of life'.[176] The communitarianism of these earlier Protestant was a contingent response to circumstances with no ambition to transform the wider world. Therefore, Cole argues, groups such as the Rappites and Shakers should not be seen as precursors to Owenite socialists.

By contrast, Arthur E. Bestor maintains that Owenites and earlier Protestant communalists each represented a 'phase' in the development of a common tradition of 'communitarian socialism'. Bestor defines this 'communitarian' tradition by its experimental, rather than 'revolutionary' or 'gradualist', approach to social change.[177] He argues that in the development of this tradition, 'the religious socialism of the seventeenth century evolved without break into the secular socialism of the nineteenth'.[178] The allure of this presentation of an *ideological* succession is, of course, enhanced, by the Owenite community of New Harmony having *physically* succeeded the Rappites, taking over the site beside the Wabash river in Indiana which had previously been occupied by a Rappite colony. Bestor argues that the existence of a tradition of religious socialism, reflected in the Shaker, Rappite, and Zoarite communities, was 'the most important single factor behind the American enthusiasm for Owenism and Fourierism in the second quarter of the nineteenth century'.[179] It provided evidence of viability of communitarianism as a model of social change. However, this continuity between earlier religious and later secular socialism existed only in North America. In Europe, the influence of Enlightenment rationalism and militant anticlericalism meant that the 'outspoken secular founders of modern socialism' owed nothing to 'the religious reformers of an earlier period'.[180] Bestor argues that in North America, but not in Europe, the existence of a prior tradition of religious socialism demonstrated the plausibility of communitarianism as a model of change, and therefore explains the

[175] Cole, 97.
[176] Cole, 98; 97.
[177] Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 14.
[178] Bestor, 38.
[179] Bestor, 57.
[180] Bestor, 38.

popularity of Owenite socialism on the continent. Bestor argues not only that there was continuity between Owenite socialism and Protestant communalism, but that it was in virtue of this continuity that the former appeared plausible to North Americans.

Amy Hart also argues that there was continuity between Protestant communalists and Owenite socialists, dismissing the idea of a distinction between earlier 'religious' communities and later 'secular' socialist communities. Instead, she argues, many leaders of Owenite communities understood themselves to be 'creating a Heaven on Earth and fulfilling God's plans for humanity'.[181] These communities married 'religious, economic, or social' goals, seeking a 'more just and ethical world' while also 'referenc[ing] principles derived from the Bible to justify and guide their cooperative economic model'.[182] Hart's account emphasises that many socialists justified their attempts at worldly improvement by appeal to divine intention, and she therefore rejects the idea of a distinction between earlier 'religious' and later 'secular' communities.

Claeys reduces the sharpness of the dichotomy between earlier Protestant and later socialist communities, but without challenging the distinction itself. Claeys argues that the 'Shakers, Dunkers, Harmonists, Moravians and other Christian sects' constituted 'a clear tradition of communitarianism upon which the early socialists drew' such that any 'understanding of modern socialism has to take this communitarian tradition as its point of departure'.[183] Both early socialists and those Christian sects

> can be understood as a variant upon discourses of belonging, sociability and community. Both have aspired to a life lived much more transparently, in public, with a corresponding reduction in the private sphere and antagonism towards deviant forms of individualism (focusing on one partner in John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida community, for instance), an atmosphere of public confession, and of criticism and self-criticism. Although the association of sin with class origin is largely absent in early socialism (but very pronounced in Bolshevism and its imitators), the denial of individualism is not. In addition, central to both the utopian idea and

[181] Hart, 'On Earth as It Is in Heaven', 6.
[182] Hart, 3; 6.
[183] Claeys, 'Early Socialism as Intellectual History', 899.

> much communitarian practice was an essentially heretical (but also Platonic) view of marriage, the family, and sexuality.[184]

Lockley also argues that Protestant communalists and Owenite socialists had a common understanding of social change. He rejects G.D.H. Cole's claim that Protestant communalists adopted shared goods and labour only in order to endure frontier life, arguing instead that they did so as an expression of their religious ideals; they explicitly linked community of property to the social organisation of the earliest Christians and to the social order to be expected in the Millennium.[185] Having rejected the claim that Owenites and Protestant communalists were dissimilar because only the former were philosophically committed to the value of community life, Lockley then continues to argue that Protestant communalists and Owenite socialists had a similar understanding of social change.[186] When Protestant communalists shared their property and labour, they maintained that doing so aided, heralded, or realised the Millennium which would transform the world.[187] They argued either that the sharing of property was a preparation for the imminent Millennium, in which there would be no personal possessions. Or, that this sharing of property was itself the realisation of the Millennium, part of a process in which earth became closer to heaven and everyday experience took on a divine quality.[188] Philip Lockley argues that early socialists held the same conception of the relationship between present action and the transformation of the world, understanding the establishment of community as bringing the future closer as part of a 'secular eschatology'.[189] Both early socialists and Protestant communalists understood the organisation of communities as preparation for the future, or as reflecting the arrival of the future, or as disrupting the present in order to bring the world closer to an ideal.[190]

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[184] Claeys, 899.
[185] Lockley, 'Mapping Protestant Communalism', 17–21.
[186] Lockley, 'Trans-Atlantic Reputations', 218.
[187] Lockley, 218.
[188] Lockley, 'Mapping Protestant Communalism', 37–38.
[189] Lockley, 'Trans-Atlantic Reputations', 218–19.
[190] In other work, Lockley extends this parallel between Protestant communalism and socialism to include socialist and Christian eschatology more broadly. He argues that all incarnations of socialism are 'ultimately about imagined futures' and are 'accompanied by an inherent hopefulness about the future', so that there is always 'an obvious point of prospective interaction and overlap with future-thinking in Christian eschatology, or, as some would term it, theologies of hope'. Lockley, 'Christian Doubt and Hope in Early Socialism', 379.

While Tam, Arneil, and Cole emphasise the discontinuity between Protestant communalists and Owenite socialists, Bestor, Claeys, Lockley, and Hart stress the continuity. Some of these disagreements are factual, such as whether Protestant communalists had a contingent or principled commitment to communitarian social organisation. Others appear to be differences in focus. While Bestor seeks to explain the resonance of Owenite ideas among North Americans, Claeys and Lockley are concerned with the influence of Protestant communalism on the formation of Owenite ideas.

The extent of influence by, or continuity with, Protestant communalists might also differ between Owenite communities. A community such as Spa Fields (1821-4) aimed to address the immediate needs of members, using economies of scale to increase purchasing power and reduce necessary labour, and drew upon existing informal patterns of social and economic cooperation.[191] Other communities such as Orbiston or Queenwood neither emerged organically nor were aimed primarily at immediate benefit, but were founded to demonstrate the truth of socialist principles or to inspire imitators.[192] There were also 'unofficial' communities, such as the Birkacre Co-operative Community (1831-3) operated by the Calico Block Printers Union at Chorley. Such communities were disconnected from central Owenite organisations, but their records were poor and they have been little studied by historians despite being, in some instances, 'truer to Owen's ideas' than New Harmony or Queenwood had been.[193] By contrast, New Harmony and Manea Fen each produced their own journals, the *New Harmony Gazette* (1825-8) and *Working Bee* (1839-40). Similarly, the printing of the *New Moral World* was moved Queenwood in 1845, shortly before the community collapse and the journal folded. Unsurprisingly, these journals recorded detailed information about events at their respective communities, leaving other 'unofficial' Owenite communities to relative historical neglect.[194] Owenite communities were diverse in both their inspiration and their organisation, ranging from those which were centrally organised and carefully planned to those which emerged by

[191] Bennett, *The Hidden Oak*, 63–84; Garnett, *Co-Operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities*, 42–44.
[192] I say 'primarily' because there were disagreements at Orbiston between those who were seeking to advance their immediate interests and those who were motivated by principle. Donnachie, 'Orbiston', 7–10; Fraser, *Alexander Campbell and the Search for Socialism*, chap. 2.
[193] Coates, 'Communities of Co-Operation', 47.
[194] This relative availability of records might also contribute, alongside historians' interest in the curious and romantic, to disproportionate attention being conferred on the community-founding activities of Owenites at the expense of the other activities pursued by members.

formalising existing practices of mutuality. It might then be the case that no single account of the influence of, or affinity with, Protestant communalism can adequately characterise these diverse communities.

A further question is how this bears upon 'socialism', and whether, to the extent that Owenism is a successor to Protestant communalism, it is therefore less mature as an incarnation of socialism. In part this is a question not about the role of Protestantism, but instead about the relationship between socialism and communitarianism. Should they be seen as complementary in virtue of a shared suspicion of individualism and a preference for interdependence and reciprocity? Or is there a tension between socialism as concerned with collective control and ownership of economic institutions and communitarianism as promotive of localised solutions to social problems and the reorganisation of society into small units as the means or end of social change. Axel Honneth argues that socialism has 'always been based on the notion of a communitarian life-form, rather than merely a more just system of distribution'.[195] By contrast, Gregory Claeys argues that while communitarianism represents one strand within socialism, this is a strand which was becoming increasingly anachronistic in the nineteenth century. Based upon an earlier, pastoral, moral tradition, this vision of intentional communities was unable to offer appropriate solutions to the problems of a complex industrial economy. The maturation of socialism required a shift away from that 'earlier utopianism and communitarian economics' and towards 'economic socialism'. This was a shift from constrained consumption and discomfort with luxury goods to increased production, from a focus on the benefits of agriculture to one on manufacturing, and from localised to national solutions to social problems.[196] On this account, communitarianism stands in tension with later incarnations of socialism which celebrate technological development and increased efficiency, advocating for localised solutions which are anachronistic for large, complex economies. As Claeys suggests, '[c]ommunitarian Owenism, it is true, was never wholly *of* the modern world, for the life, culture and external circumstances of the new communities was to be a mixture of the best of both rural and urban, agricultural and manufacturing, innocent and sophisticated'.[197] Rather than informing an economic analysis or political strategy, the

[195] Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism*, 27–28.
[196] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 111; 31; xvi.
[197] Claeys, 31.

influence of the Diggers was to encourage 'reversion to apostolic community', and it was only when such influences could be shed that modern socialism might emerge.[198] Communitarianism appears to be antiquated, even vestigial, a remnant of an earlier puritan and pastoral tradition which has little relevant to say to 'the modern world' or to 'economic' socialism. This is a dichotomy between the 'other-worldly projector' and the 'this-worldly co-operator', and according to this account, 'religious and economic socialism [are] usually at opposite ends of a spectrum'.[199] These contrasting visions of the relationship between communitarianism and socialism might lead one to see the relationship between Owenite socialists and Protestant communalists in different ways. If the 'communitarian life-form' is the grounding of socialism, then Protestant communalism appears to be a natural predecessor for socialism. However, if communitarianism represents an outdated political strategy to promote socialist goals in the context of complex, industrial economies, then Protestant communalism appears to be an archaic influence, preventing socialists from coming to reckon with the needs of the modern world.[200]

In Section 2.1.3, I have described how scholars have disagreed about the degree to which Owenites borrowed from, or shared features with, Christian traditions. I argued that the characterisations of Owenites as millennialists (Section 2.1.3.1) and sectarians (Section 2.1.3.2) have often been unhelpful because these terms are frequently used imprecisely and because they carry misleading connotations. In the case of 'millennialism', these are connotations about the emotional and psychological roots of a particular attitude towards change. In the case of 'sectarianism', these are connotations about the relationship between the movement's activities, ultimate goals, and ethos. In Section 2.1.3.3, I noted the existence of disagreements about whether Owenite socialism marked a break from, shared a common tradition with, or inherited from, earlier Protestant communalism. I sought to clarify exactly what these were disagreements *about*, suggesting that they are partially factual and partially conceptual,

[198] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 42.
[199] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 189; 154.
[200] It is an open question whether this is a disagreement about socialism's relationship with communitarianism or about whether communitarianism should be understood as the valuation of communal identity or as the organisation of intentional communities.

and that they intersect with further disagreements about the relationship between socialism and communitarianism.

2.1.4 Rational Religion

In Section 2.1.4, I note that some scholars have identified Owenites as promoting a novel 'rational religion'. However, I will argue that these existing scholarly accounts have been inadequate because they seek to translate this rational religion into secular terms. In Chapter 3, I will then seek to offer an account of the Owenite engagement with the nature of religion which overcomes these inadequacies.

The adjective 'rational' and its cognates were favourite Owenite terms. To charge an institution with 'irrationality' was not only to identify the existence and nature of the problem, but also to offer an explanation and to prescribe a solution. It was not merely to allege that an institution was ill-designed to achieve its goals, but also to suggest that such failure flowed from an insufficient adherence to Owenite social science and particularly to the doctrine of circumstances. Links between Owenite socialism and 'rationality' were further entrenched by the April 1839 decision of the central Owenite organisation to adopt the name of the 'Universal Community of Rational Religionists', often shortened to the 'Rational Society'. Scholars have described Owenites as offering one of the 'secular religions of the nineteenth century', a 'self-proclaimed, science-based, post-Christian religion', a 'new religion of human emancipation', 'an *anti*-religion', as preaching a 'religion of humanity' a 'religion of brotherliness', or a 'social religion of their own' which was 'an alternative to all denominational religion'.[201] In this section, I will explain how scholars have interpreted the nature and importance of the Owenite 'rational religion'.[202] I will note three problematic features of these scholarly accounts, each of which reflects a tendency to translate the Owenite 'rational religion' into secular terms. The

[201] Browne, 'Eve and the New Jerusalem', 221; Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 187; Stedman Jones, 'Utopian Socialism Reconsidered', 142; Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 160; Picon, 'Utopian Socialism and Social Science', 77; Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 87; 95–96; Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 297–98.

[202] In Chapter 6, I discuss some other socialist attempts to establish a novel religion or a renewed form of Christianity, including those of French socialist Pierre Leroux and founder of the Labour Church John Trevor. These attempts were often motivated either by a perception that existing forms of religion had failed to provide appropriate moral guidance and social solidarity or that existing forms of religion offered an obstacle to the achievement of social change.

first feature is the tendency to translate rational religion into a non-religious idiom, and in particular to translate the rational religion into the language of morality. The rational religion, we are told, is *really* about the promotion of a purer form of morality. The second feature is that the Owenite 'rational religion' is explained as the product of a set of circumstances in which moral and epistemic authority, conventionally monopolised by religious institutions, could be contested only by adopting the form of a religion. The third feature is a misleading reliance upon analogies with 'secular religions' such as Auguste Comte's 'Religion of Humanity'. Each of these features reflects an understanding of Owenite rational religion as a 'religion' only in a superficial sense, as taking the form of a religion when it is *really* about morality or as a function of the competition for authority with religious organisations or because of reluctance to take the final step towards the abandonment of religion.

Even where attention is committed to Owenite rational religion without seeking to translate it into a secular idiom, there is little reflection on how this rational religion fits within their broader socialism. There is little consideration of whether there is a tension between the creation of a rational religion and attempts at founding communities, organising community stores, establishing an alternative to orthodox political economy, or advertising their account of character formation. That is, there is no investigation of how *socialist* the interest in rational religion is. This is a subject which will be discussed both in Chapter 3 and, particularly, in Chapter 5.

In the remainder of this section, I will note three common features of scholarly accounts of Owenite rational religion. First, they translate rational religion into the language of morality. Second, they explain the adoption of the form of a 'religion' as a result of socialists' competing on conventionally religious terrain. Third, they appeal to misleading analogies with 'secular religions' such as Comte's 'Religion of Humanity'.

2.1.4.1 Rational Religion as Morality

The first feature of scholarly accounts of Owenite 'rational religion' is that they often suggest that this is a metaphorical description for an enriched form of morality. The search for a novel religion, such accounts suggest, is *really* about the attempt to inculcate a new cooperative ethos to replace the

acquisitive, competitive motivations which predominated in the old immoral world. Such accounts *translate* the Owenite aspiration for a novel religion into terms which are both more secular and more familiarly socialist. They do not merely suggest that Owenite religion includes an ethical dimension. Instead, they claim that Owenite religion *is exhausted by* or *includes only* or simply *is* morality. Willard Wolfe argues that, at the heart of the socialist tradition are not systems of property or economic analysis, but a 'Socialist faith':

> the Owenite faith was closely akin to the "New Christianity" of Saint-Simon and to the "Religion of Humanity" of Auguste Comte. All three saw in moral regeneration the great requirement of the age, and all three understood morality in a similar sense: as charity, benevolence, or altruism…Each looked to his newly formed faith – a secular version of Christian ethics, supported by appropriate liturgical trappings – to instil essential sympathies in the people, and to prepare them morally for the social order of the future (In these faiths, therefore, social and moral came to be almost interchangeable terms).[203]

On Wolfe's account, this 'socialist faith', which was so central to socialism, was 'a secular version of Christian ethics, supported by appropriate liturgical trappings' which was to serve the goal of moral regeneration and preparation. Similarly, Eileen Yeo describes how a 'religion of brotherliness' was to promote the solidarity necessary for the successful operation of communities, how the goal of 'rational religion [was] preparation for community life'.[204] R.H. Tawney characterises Owenism as a 'religion' for many 'thoughtful wage-earners' who saw Owen as the 'prophet who had laid his finger on the mystery of iniquity, and had preached a fraternal gospel by which the capitalist demon could be brought to heel'.[205] As I will argue in the next chapter, I do not object to the claim that rational religion involves, to a significant degree, the promotion of the virtues which are necessary for socialism to be successful. However, I do object to the claim that the Owenite rational religion is *merely* or *ultimately* concerned with encouraging morality. If the rational religion is *really* about cultivating the ethos to support socialism, then this raises the question of whether this is the intention of the rational religion

[203] Wolfe, *From Radicalism to Socialism*, 15–16.
[204] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture'.
[205] Tawney, 'Robert Owen', 37–38.

or merely a happy benefit. And if the former, if Owenites created a novel religion only in order to nurture a socialist ethos, then who was aware that this was the ultimate goal? Did all Owenites understand this novel religion as merely instrumental? And if so, would such an understanding not be self-defeating? That is, Owenites adopt the form of a 'religion' precisely because it confers an intrinsic justificatory or authoritative force upon their attempts to promote a richer morality. Yet, if the rational religion were adopted only because of its temporal benefits, then the recognition of this fact would show that the religion lacked truth value and so would undermine those benefits.[206] Or is there instead a distinction between cunning leaders seeking to create the conditions for the success of socialism and naïve followers duped into adopting a new religion?

These accounts present the Owenite rational religion as involving the promotion of richer social bonds, of 'brotherliness', of 'essentially sympathies' which 'prepare them morally for the social order of the future'. Given the centrality of an enriched morality to socialism, such accounts recognise the rational religion as central to the success of Owenism. However, it is unclear for whom the rational religion is a matter of morality. If it is widely recognised that 'rational religion' is merely morality, then this appears to be self-defeating. Yet, if it is not widely recognised, then this appears to rely upon an account of the movement as implausibly divided between cunning leaders and gullible followers.

2.1.4.2 Rational Religion and Competition for Authority

The second feature of accounts of Owenite rational 'religion' does not translate this rational religion into secular moral terms, but instead explains its form as the product of Owenites competing for authority upon terrain traditionally governed by religious institutions. Owenite arguments took on the form of a 'rational religion' because they were competing with Christian churches about who had the authority to settle certain kinds of questions. Adopting the form of a religion was, on this account, simply the price of entry to this early nineteenth-century competition over claims to epistemic or moral

[206] This self-defeatingness has been described by Ronald Beiner as the 'civil religion paradox', in which advocating a religion for its temporal benefits serves only to undermine the religion itself. Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 116–17.

authority. Such an explanation, then, implies that the rational religion was a superficial form for Owenite arguments, and one which was adopted as a function of their particular context.

This is an explanation offered by Barbara Taylor, who argues that Owenites used the moniker of a 'religion' only because they were competing on traditionally religious terrain. That is, they were seeking to 'remodel and rationalize popular belief', to assert 'an alternative ethical code', and to claim 'the moral and psychic authority previously hegemonized by organized religion'.[207] Such questions of belief and ethics were the conventional territory of the 'dominant ideological institutions of the period' and the resulting confrontation with the churches was 'bitter'.[208] And, Taylor argues, it was because they sought to compete on this territory, territory traditionally governed by organised religion, that they adopted the form of a rational 'religion' in which to present their arguments. It was because their attempts to transform belief and to alter moral rules required them to usurp the control of organised religion that they used the form of a religion when they were, in fact, offering 'an *anti*-religion'.[209] They adopted the form of the 'rational *religion*' only because they were seeking to invade and capture the traditional territory of religious institutions.

Similarly, Gareth Stedman Jones explains that early socialists offered a 'religion' because they sought to 'capture the religious domain'.[210] Socialists claimed to be offering a 'science of human nature' which had 'solved the mystery of social harmony and universal happiness'. However, because they inhabited a world in which natural laws were perceived to be divinely-endorsed, they therefore 'regarded the newly discovered laws of human nature as the laws of God, [and] they could not but imply a privileged intimacy with the mechanics of the divine'.[211] That is, in virtue of a perceived relationship between scientific knowledge and understanding of the divine, their claim to have discovered the true laws of nature implied also a claim about knowledge of God. Their claim to have discovered a new social science which offered the grounds for a new ethical code saw socialists trespass upon the 'territory of pre-existing moral theory - *par excellence* the Christian church'.[212] With the conflict this aroused,

[207] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 160; 122–23.
[208] Taylor, 122–23.
[209] Taylor, 160.
[210] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 187, 188.
[211] Stedman Jones, 'Utopian Socialism Reconsidered', 141–43.
[212] Stedman Jones, 141–43.

socialism's 'true enemy' became the church, against whom 'socialists fought their battles more consistently…[than against] the state or a class of capitalists'.[213] It was because these socialists challenged the authority of existing religious institutions to determine questions about human nature and moral reality, that 'religiosity was not extrinsic but inherent in the structure of early socialist thought'.[214]

Both Taylor and Stedman Jones explain the form of the rational 'religion' as being adopted because claims to moral or scientific authority necessarily brought competition with religious institutions, and this competition required that socialists present their own 'religion'. It was because they competed with the Christian Church that they adopted the form of a 'religion'. Despite the parallels in their arguments, Taylor and Stedman Jones draw wildly different conclusions. For Taylor, this shows that the Owenite rational religion was merely a rhetorical mask for an '*anti*-religion'. For Stedman Jones, it demands how 'religiosity was…inherent in the structure of early socialist thought'. Irrespective of these differences, both appeal to the socialist competition upon conventionally religious terrain as explaining their use of the language of a rational 'religion'.

2.1.4.3 Rational Religion as Secular Religion

The third feature of accounts of Owenite 'rational religion' is a tendency to draw parallels with subsequent attempts, especially by Auguste Comte and British Positivists in the later nineteenth century, to create a 'secular religion'.[215] This is itself a slippery and opaque concept, but it tends to describe an institution which fulfils the social functions of traditional religions but without any propositional commitments about the divine. Comte's 'Religion of Humanity' was an attempt to create a unifying grounding for the new industrial order, to 'provide the scientific-humanist equivalent to

[213] Stedman Jones, 142.
[214] Stedman Jones, 142. This account of Owenite rational religion as primarily a matter of empirical claims about the workings of the natural and social world is echoed by Robert Davis and Frank O'Hagan, who argue that Owen's 'new religion in fact represents an elaborate consolidation of the empiricist and necessitarian doctrines evident in Owen's social theory from its inception'. This account of rational religion as a restatement of claims about the environmental formation of character and epistemological claims about the formation of knowledge from sense experience supports Stedman Jones's view of rational 'religion' as primarily philosophical or empirical. Davis and O'Hagan, *Robert Owen*, 138.
[215] Browne, 'Eve and the New Jerusalem'; Claeys, 'Non-Marxian Socialism 1815-1914', 547; Wolfe, *From Radicalism to Socialism*, 15–16.

what systematic theology had been in the high Middle Ages'.[216] This included doctrine, largely drawn from Comte's own work, moral rules which would guide the operation of social institutions, and rituals such as public festivals, which would cultivate love towards Humanity.[217] The expression of love towards others was central to Comte's Religion, being promoted by its rituals and encourage by its doctrinal teachings. The parallel between Owenite Rational Religion and a Positivist Religion of Humanity is suggested when G.D.H. Cole identifies Owenite religion as 'in effect a secularist religion of humanity, without any sort of theological dogma'.[218] Similarly, Royden Harrison inserts Owen into a 'tradition of secular religiosity' alongside Saint Simon, John Francis Bray, Colin, and Comte, and which is taken up by the later Positivists. Harrison comments that

> The hall-mark of a secular religion is that it replaces God with some other agency which is supposed to be subject to empirical investigation. Just as righteousness had consisted in acting in accordance with the Will of God, so now it is identified with actions which are in conformity with the laws of this newly discovered agency. The conflict between religion and science disappears and moral rules at last become scientifically demonstrable.[219]

Yet, such parallels with Comte's 'Religion of Humanity' and with British Positivists are misleading. They orient attention to the later nineteenth century, and to attempts to design a form of 'secular' religion which serves as the necessary social glue in an atomising society but without any claims about a divine presence. Such parallels imply that the Owenite attempt to establish a Rational Religion represented a repudiation of existing forms of religion which included a prominent role of humans' relationship with God as the grounds of morality and community. They suggest that the Rational Religion was a step towards the abolition of religion, which retained the trappings of religion only to reassure those unprepared to take the final leap by abandoning religion altogether.[220] More illuminating parallels are available.

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[216] Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity*, 2.
[217] Wernick, 1–2.
[218] Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 130.
[219] Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 252–53.
[220] Stanley Pierson offers such an account of the John Trevor's Labour Church. Pierson, 'John Trevor and the Labor Church Movement'.

Arguments that reason should be conferred a substantial role in settling questions about religious truth have a rich history. Frequently such arguments have been offered not by those who were seeking to 'replace God' or even to dismiss Christian Revelation. Instead, they are ventured by those who sought a richer and truer understanding of Revelation. Often, the call for a greater role for reason was a rejection of the layers of authoritative interpretations of scripture which had come to augment and corrupt the true and simple message of the Bible. Instead, figures such as the Rational Dissenters argued, a principle of *sola scriptura* should be adopted, according to which the Bible should be read using one's reason alone, without any dependence upon authoritative interpretations. This effort to create a more rational religion was not a step towards secularisation, nor was it a critique of religion. Instead, it was part of a debate 'within' religion, about how scripture should be read.[221] Analogies with 'secular religions' distract from that fact that in early nineteenth-century Britain, it was such arguments which offered the greatest precedent for the Owenite search for a rational religion. Similarly, attempts to reconcile the 'conflict between religion and science' were more likely to be inspired by Rational Dissenters than anticipating later secular religions. Of course, the aspiration towards a more 'rational religion' was not the sole preserve of Rational Dissenters, and many deists sought to claim an even greater role for reason, arguing for the sufficiency of reason, or the idea that reason might arbitrate questions about the truth of revelation.[222] It is these efforts, of both deists and Rational Dissenters, and not the 'secular religions' of Comte or the Positivists, which offer the greater parallel for the Owenite rational religion. This is an argument to which I will return in both Chapter 3 and, particularly, in Chapter 4.

In Section 2.1.4, I have described three common features of accounts of Owenite rational religion. First, that rational religion is *really* about morality. Second, that the form of a religion is adopted because of a competition over authority taking place on conventionally religious terrain. Third, the

[221] Hickman, *Eighteenth-Century Dissent and Cambridge Platonism*, 20–31; 91–96.
[222] Hickman, 75–91.

appeal to misleading analogies with 'secular religions' such as Auguste Comte's 'Religion of Humanity'. Each reflects a tendency to translate 'rational religion' into more familiarly secular and socialist terms.

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2.2 Owenism as Socialism and Trade Unionism

In Section 2.1, I noted how scholars have described the relationship between Owenite socialism and religion, with accounts identifying Owenites as determinedly anti-religious, as borrowing from or sharing features with the Christian tradition, and as offering a 'rational religion'. In Section 2.2, I identify a different feature of scholarly interpretations of Owenite socialism. I note the existence of widespread neglect of the prominence and creativity of religious argument and engagement in Owenite socialism. And I explain this neglect by showing how accounts of Owenism often focus upon their role in British socialist and labour history as a precursor to syndicalism, a formative influence upon trade unionism, and a founding instance of socialism. Focus is often directed towards the nature and degree of the movement's influence upon subsequent socialism and trade unionism. I show that this focus shapes understandings of Owenites in a way which conceals Owenites' interest in religious questions. It does so because subsequent socialism and trade unionism are often associated with an indifference or hostility to religion. There are two ways in which this leads to a neglect of religious questions within Owenite socialism.

The first is that scholars of Owenism have been motivated by the search to discover the origins of subsequent socialism. Owenite socialism is interpreted as a 'forerunner' of subsequent socialism, as a 'link in the continuous chain which stretched from 1789 to the present-day labour movement'.[223] Questions are asked about the extent to which Owenites laid the foundations for, or anticipated, or inspired, later socialism. In virtue of the attempt to discover the roots of subsequent socialism, these are questions which are shaped by that later socialism. They are questions about Owenites' relationship to industrialisation, economic change, intensifying economic exploitation, or to increasing production. Or about whether Owenites had yet adopted a social analysis based on class and production, or

[223] Harrison, 'A New View of Mr Owen', 3; Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*.

remained wedded to eighteenth-century radicalism's dichotomies of rich and poor or emphasis on Old Corruption.[224] Such questions project the concerns of later socialists backwards onto Owenism. In some instances, this leads to misconceptions and errors. In others, however, it leads not to misunderstanding but rather to an excessive focus upon some, and neglect of other, features of the movement, which contributes to lopsided interpretations of the movement.

The second way in which the concerns of later socialists have shaped interpretation of Owenism is in virtue of the legitimation conferred by claiming Owenites as antecedents. Owenism stands at the founding of socialism, so subsequent socialists engaged in skirmishes over the appropriate tactics or philosophical approach have often sought to co-opt Owenites as ancestors for their own views. For example, Tony Blair claimed Robert Owen as a proud forebear of Blair's own 'ethical socialism'.[225] For Blair, the most important feature of Owen's thought was his appreciation of the need for a societal ethos of responsibility to serve as an immunisation against the danger of 'the anarchy of mutual indifference – and its corollary, the domination of the powerless by the powerful – or the tyranny of collective coercion'.[226] As an interpretation of Owen's thought, this is implausible. However, it does serve quite well as a summary of Blair's own principal philosophical preoccupations. This interpretation clearly reflects a desire to find in the original socialism the roots of one's own thought in order to claim the legitimation which comes from such a lineage. Although this is a particularly stark example, it reflects a wider tendency for subsequent socialists to discover their own interests, concerns, and philosophy in the thought of the Owenites in a way which can generate odd interpretations.

In each of these instances, where historians search for the origins of later socialism and where later socialists seek to legitimate their own project by discovering its roots, accounts of Owenism are shaped by the subsequent development of socialism. This has either discouraged examination of the extent to which Owenites were concerned with religious questions or has encouraged scholars to discount those concerns as non-socialist, personal, vestigial, unimportant, or idiosyncratic. Instead, scholars and socialists have focused attention upon those features which are shared with, or those questions which

[224] Lichtheim, *The Origins of Socialism*, 105; Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*; Thompson, 'Senex's Letters on Associated Labour', 14.
[225] Donnachie and Mooney, 'From Owenite Socialism to Blairite Social-Ism'.
[226] Donnachie and Mooney, 282.

were animating for, later socialists. I treat socialism and trade unionism together here because the same arguments apply to both. In each case, the attempts to identify their roots in Owenism have shaped understandings of the movement. And each of socialism and trade unionism have been historically associated with the emergence of a secular proletariat in a way which has directed attention away from the religious interests of Owenites. So long as scholars of the history of socialism and trade unionism remain wedded to visions of those movements as indifferent or simply antipathetic to religion, then interpretations of Owenites *as socialists* or *as trade unionists* will tend to reinforce this neglect.

The attempt to claim Owenism as a venerable precursor dates, at least, to the Fabians. Fabians including Frank Podmore, Graham Wallas, and Margaret and G.D.H. Cole, each declared him the 'Father of Socialism'.[227] G.D.H. Cole was keen to emphasise the practicality of Owen and the engagement of Owenites in concrete socialist and trade unionist organisation, and to characterise the latter years of the movement as ones of decline. In his *The Life of Robert Owen*, G. D. H. Cole discusses the years following 1834 only in a chapter entitled 'Old Age'. He describes these as Owen's 'years of dotage', 'long years of his decay', in which 'he was already an old man' who had 'lost that practical grip'. It would be, Cole argues, 'obviously unfair and misleading to judge him by what he did in old age', before reiterating that one should '[j]udge him, not by his old age, but by the works of his manhood'.[228] Cole argues that the 'the religious element in Owenism increased with the decline of its industrial influence' and that 'Owenism, in its latest phases, was clearly much less "socialistic", in any ordinary sense of the term, than it had been when its working-class influence was at its height.[229] Cole does not *ignore* the religious interests, but he characterises them as the eccentric products of a period of 'decay' and decrepitude, of a period in which the movement was 'much less "socialistic"'. The Webbs were both keen to claim Owen for their intellectual lineage, and so their interpretations paid no interest to religious concerns, which might have been seen as either discrediting or irrelevant. Sidney Webb's interpretation emphasised Owen's 'constant insistence on the corporate duty of the community to its individual members [which] was really the forerunner of the successful "municipal

[227] Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*; Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 86; Cole, *Robert Owen of New Lanark*; Joad, *Robert Owen, Idealist*; Podmore, *Robert Owen: A Biography*; Wallas, *Men & Ideas*.
[228] Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 312; 321–22.
[229] Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 129–31.

Socialism" which our great cities have since taken up'.[230] Beatrice Webb in her *The Cooperative Movement in Great Britain* praised Owen as 'the father of English Socialism not the Socialism of foreign manufacture which cries for a Utopia of anarchy to be brought about by murderous revolution, but the distinctively English Socialism, the Socialism which discovers itself in works and not in words'.[231] These Fabian accounts emphasise Owenism as practical, reasonable, and English in contrast to disruptive, revolutionary, and abstract Marxism. The Fabian determination to claim Owenism as such an ancestor produces accounts such as Cole's, which dismiss religious interests as merely eccentric, or the Webbs', which ignore those interests entirely.

The most important interpretive framework through which Owenite socialism has been interpreted is that furnished by later Marxism. Marx and Engels were (among) the first to describe Robert Owen and his followers as 'utopian socialists'. This is a characterisation first found in the *Communist Manifesto* and subsequently developed in Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Such a description gathered Owen alongside Fourier and Saint-Simon to form an awkward triumvirate marked more by their significant differences than any similarities. Such a classification has endured on account of the influence of Marx and Engels over later socialism, and led to the subordination of the 'utopian socialists" differences to their apparent affinities, especially their shared, inevitable failure to approach a Marxist 'scientific socialism'. Because they antedated the existence of an industrial proletariat, they failed to see how class-antagonism was a motor of change rather than a conflict to be abolished by 'a specially contrived organisation of society'.[232] Yet, the differences between Owen, Fourier, and Saint-Simon are weighty. While Owen identified the means and end of transformation as involving self-organisation into small communities, Saint-Simon advocated for centralised control of production. While Owen emphasised the plasticity of human character in his 'doctrine of circumstances', Fourier stressed the fixity of character-types made from combinations of the passions. Even in contemporary, non-Marxist scholarship today, Owen is frequently still labelled alongside Fourier and Saint-Simon as a 'utopian socialist'.[233] Interpretation of Owenism (rather than merely Owen) was similarly refracted

[230] Webb, *English Progress towards Social Democracy*, 10.
[231] Webb, *The Cooperative Movement in Great Britain*.
[232] Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', 257.
[233] See, for example, Beecher, 'Early European Socialism'; Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists*.

through the lens of the *Communist Manifesto*'s description of the 'disciples' of 'utopian socialism' as 'form[ing] reactionary sects', who dogmatically sought the sponsorship of bourgeois philanthropists and were distinguished by their 'fantastic faith in the miraculous effects of their social science'.[234] By contrast, Marxism was a scientific socialism. This distinction directs historical inquiry in a certain way. It encourages the investigation of that which is shared (or not shared) with Marxian socialism, and so of the traditional problems of exploitation, historical inevitability, on the stadial development of socio-economic formations, on a labour theory of value. Even many of those staunchly rejecting the viability of a distinction between 'utopian' and 'scientific' socialism still proceed within the framework that the dichotomy supplies. On account of the enduring prominence (even if not popularity) of the distinction it continues to shape the kinds of questions which are posed of Owenite socialism.[235]

Interpretations of Owenism have also been influenced by the attempts of scholars to find in the movement the origins of Marxism. It is argued, for example, that Owenism was 'a vital link in the process of the development of one strand of late eighteenth-century radicalism towards Marxism' which anticipated much of Marxian political economy. Such an influence can be seen in both Engels' *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* and Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.[236] Gregory Claeys argues that, in writing his *Umrisse*, 'Engels took many of his most striking early arguments from [Owenite John] Watts', and Engels' text, in turn, 'almost immediately assisted in leading Marx himself more deeply into such an engagement [with classical political economy]'.[237] In virtue of its influence upon Marx and Engels, the study of Owenism can elucidate their thinking on questions such as the withering of the state, the extension of social and economic participation, specialisation, historical materialism, and the pervasiveness of competition.[238] Further, by investigating these Owenite roots, one can better understand the origins of some of the odd inadequacies of

[234] Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', 258.
[235] The category of 'utopian' socialism is also unhelpful because it conceals substantial disagreement about what is meant by 'utopian' and because it distracts from the practical activities of Owenites. Harrison, 'A New View of Mr Owen', 3. Further, the distinction with 'scientific' socialism conceals the extent to which Owenites were themselves enthusiastic about their own science of human nature, about the social science which equipped them to reorganise society, and about the advances in natural science which enabled technological improvements and therefore greater productivity. Leopold, 'Scientific Socialism'.
[236] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 7; Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 166–89.
[237] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 167.
[238] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 7–14; 51; Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 167, 181–83.

Marxian theory, such as the meagre account of politics.[239] Similar identifications of Owenites in virtue of their apparent influence upon subsequent socialism abound. Anton Menger anointed William Thompson as the 'the most eminent founder of scientific socialism', with a 'train of thought, and even the mode of expression which reappear later on in the works of so many other Socialists, especially Marx and Rodbertus'.[240] Harold Laski argued that Thompson was one of the 'men who laid the foundations' which Marx and Engels 'brought so remarkably to completion'.[241] These accounts identify Owenites as meriting interest in virtue of their influence upon subsequent Marxism, encouraging interpretations focused around the traditional problematics of later socialism. For example, when Noel Thompson studies the early nineteenth-century development of popular political economy, his work manifests an implicit teleology which looks towards Marxian economics and its labour theory of value as the ultimate culmination of socialist political economy. He describes how Thomas Hodgskin and John Francis Bray were 'coming nearest to a strict labour-embodied expression', and how Robert Owen was 'trying to come to terms with the problems of thinking and reasoning in value terms'.[242] Thompson searches for the emergence of the ideas and understandings of subsequent Marxian economics, and insodoing neglects those features of the movement which don't cohere with this striving towards the birth of Marxism. He notes the importance of Malthusian population theory, but fails to see how the controversy surrounding it was entangled with debates about theodicy, sin, and humans' relationship to God. He examines the shift from the traditional moral categories of the 'just price' and 'fair wage' to the scientific language of 'natural value', but fails to recognise how those categories were so rooted in Christian theology. When he does encounter a correspondent to the *Trades Newspaper* explaining over-production as disobedience of the divine injunction to eat bread by the sweat of one's brow, it appears to be merely an odd curiosity, an 'interesting theological dimension'. Where interpretations of Owenite socialism are shaped by the concerns and preoccupations of subsequent socialists, this can lead to neglect and misinterpretation.

[239] Claeys, 'Early Socialism as Intellectual History', 896.
[240] Menger, *The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour*, 101–2.
[241] Laski, 'Introduction', 56.
[242] Thompson, *The People's Science*, 90; 75–76.

Scholars also interpret Owenism as an early instance of trade unionism, raising questions about the ways in which Owenites contributed to the practical and theoretical development of trade unionism. Focus is trained upon the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, which was among the first organisations to establish formal alliances between labourers in different trades and which offered an intriguing confluence of socialist and unionist ideas.[243] It is also notable for its rapid growth, recruiting half a million members within weeks of its foundation. Although the GNCTU ended in 'invariable and complete failure', the nature, degree, and valence of the Owenite influence upon the GNCTU, and upon nascent trade unionism, have been widely debated since.[244] Did the union fail because Owen's 'Utopian side' distracted labourers with impracticable 'dream[s] of a new heaven and a new earth' rather than 'narrower and more manageable aims'?[245] Or were the 'high hopes and utopian expectations of the Owenite missionaries' unimportant, with most unionists electing instead for a 'distinctly pragmatic approach'?[246] Or did Owenites, in fact, exert a positive influence, encouraging a systemic social critique and promoting a strategy which extended beyond immediate wage increases and sought to establish novel forms of social and economic organisation?[247] Did Owenites formulate a 'unique', 'syndicalist' vision of trade unions owning and controlling enterprises as part of a 'decentralized, socialist economy', a vision of the relationship between unions and the state which anticipated 'both syndicalism and what was later called "guild socialism"'?[248] Questions have also been asked about the extent to which Owenites were inspired by previous forms of labour organisation, whether the ideas of fraternity, harmony, and mutual aid of guilds and friendly societies.[249] Or the practices of sharing oaths or hosting lavish funeral ceremonies.[250] Focusing upon Owenism as an

[243] Cole, *Attempts at General Union*; Siméon, 'The Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, 1833-1834'; Thompson, 'Senex's Letters on Associated Labour'.
[244] Webb and Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, 137; 138.
[245] Webb and Webb, 143; 138–39.
[246] Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism 1700-1998*, 19.
[247] Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 86; Webb and Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, 158; 151. This was not limited to Robert Owen alone. Alexander Campbell was an important figure in Glasgow trade unionism, encouraging collaboration between those working in different trades and urging unionists to organise their own production rather than pursuing fruitless strike action. Fraser, *Alexander Campbell and the Search for Socialism*, 48–55.
[248] Thompson, 'Senex's Letters on Associated Labour', 21; 16; Lichtheim, *The Origins of Socialism*, 115. This was a vision promoted in the 'Letters on Associated Labour' from 'Verax', published in the *Pioneer* in 1833-4. 'Verax' was likely a pseudonym for James Morrison and James 'Elishama' Smith, prominent Owenites who edited the *Pioneer* and the *Crisis* respectively in the early 1830s.
[249] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 58.
[250] Claeys, 58.

instance of early trade unionism directs attention to questions about the novelty of their 'syndicalist' vision, about the strength and value of their influence, and about their inheritance of ideas and practices from earlier forms of labour organisation. These are, of course, important questions. However, they are also questions which direct attention in a particular way, part of a process in which the interests of secularly-minded scholars of trade unionism have contributed to the neglect of religious concerns to Owenite socialism.

Alongside Marx and Engels' famous taxonomisation of socialism, the *Communist Manifesto* also codifies and popularises an influential account of the historical origins of socialism. This is an account of socialism as rooted in technological development, economic organisation, and consequent class formation, and as a response to capitalism. Yet, such an account was, in its own context, idiosyncratic. It excluded the mystics, gnostics, theosophists, and Christian reformers who been included in 'literally every French historiography of socialism that was published between the 1830s and the early 1850s'.[251] These were figures who were widely perceived to have participated in important ways in the birth of socialism. Yet, such figures were excluded from the story of the *Communist Manifesto*, with its vision of socialism as the essentially rooted in the response of a secular proletariat to shifts in technological possibility.[252] This story has had an enduring influence, tying together the historical emergence of socialism with processes of modernisation, secularisation, urbanisation, industrialisation, and proletarianization. Socialism 'emerged with the development of industrial capitalism' and 'industrialism logically ends in socialism'.[253] The emergence of 'authentic socialism' arose with the Owenites because they were the first to be 'concerned with the particular set of problems brought to the fore by the Industrial Revolution' and the first to propose an economic analysis rather than simply asserting their interests.[254] Socialism was founded on '[r]eason, science and progress' and 'the very possibility of modern socialism' was created by 'the unqualified acceptance of the Industrial Revolution'.[255] Early

[251] Strube, 'Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism', 371; Strube, 'Contested Christianities', 24–26.
[252] Engels' own account of Owenites as essentially secular, which reflects this understanding of the nature of socialism, has continued to have an influence; when Edmund and Ruth Frow describe Owenites as either hostile or indifferent to religion, they lean heavily upon Engels' own account as supporting evidence. Frow and Frow, *The New Moral World*.
[253] Durkheim, *Socialism and Saint-Simon*, 141; Geoghegan, 'Socialism', 80.
[254] Lichtheim, *The Origins of Socialism*, 120–23.
[255] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, 241.

socialists were 'entirely bound to the intellectual and social conditions of early capitalist modernization'.[256] This is a story of the category of class superseding more traditional attachments, of urbanisation disrupting the traditional rural nexus of the parson and squire, of the increasing disenchantment of the industrialised world.[257] Socialism emerges with the creation of a concentrated, urban, and potentially organised proletariat, the development of the means of production through industrialisation, the rise of 'science', both in the increase in productive power and in the analytical methodology of scientific Marxian socialism. Max Beer identifies the intimate connection between scientific production and socialism when he marks Robert Owen 'the first British socialist who did not turn to the past for inspiration, but attempted to put the productive forces, unlocked by modern science, into the service of collective production and distribution'.[258] Gregory Claeys argues that, in the form of Owenism, 'socialism was born firmly planted in the modern world'.[259] The emergence of Owenism, an 'essentially secular' economic socialism, heralded the 'embracing of modernity'.[260] This is an alluringly simple story which ties together social structures and the history of ideas, with socialism emerges from the same conditions as, and as a response to, industrial capitalism.

One facet of this conception of the relationship between socialism and industrial modernisation is that it implies that the emergent proletariat exerts a pressure towards practical, socialist political action. This then suggests that when, and to the extent that, Owenism was a movement with roots in the proletariat, it was secular and promoted an economic analysis. It was when Owenites ceased to engage in concrete struggles, after the failure of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union in 1834 or with increased focus upon founding a new community at the end of the 1830s, that they ceased to pursue or attract the support of the working classes. Owenites began to retreat, seeking to escape from the contemporary world, focusing upon the founding of intentional communities, the cultivation of sectarian organisations, and the adoption of rites and rituals which mimicked contemporary Christianity. Here a dichotomy is established between Robert Owen (and a cadre of middle-class leaders) and Owenites, in which an increasing religiosity of the movement is attributed to the greater

[256] Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism*, 48.
[257] Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*.
[258] Beer, *A History of British Socialism*, 132.
[259] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 31.
[260] Claeys, xxvii; Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 42.

distance from the working classes. This interpretation marries together a perceived shift in the movement during the 1830s, the extent of involvement of the working classes, and assumptions about grand social processes such as 'secularisation'. It recognises the increasing engagement with religion, but attributes it to an increasing distance from the working classes and to a response to failure.

I noted in Section 2.1.3 that it has been common to identify a shift in Owenite socialism occurring around 1834, with the failure of the GNCTU, or around 1840, with an intensifying focus upon identifying a site for a community. Often, this is a shift which is presented as being both towards eccentric religiosity and away from the concerns and interests of many Owenites. The implication is that ordinary members, 'artisans and skilled workers', who were concerned with the practicalities of cooperation and trades unionism and not the strange aspirations towards religiosity, provided a pressure towards secularism. And as the movement shifted away from the cultivation of a mass membership, it moved also towards religious isolation. On Edward Royle's account, the move to abandon a previous stance of avoiding controversy and instead to undertake the 'positive adoption of a pseudo-Christian religion' was a controversial decision made by the Central Board and rejected by ordinary Owenites.[261] It was not this quasi-religiosity which appealed to the masses; instead attacks on Christianity by G.J. Holyoake and others were 'the authentic voice of socialism as understood by the artisans and factory workers of the manufacturing districts, which was ignored by the capitalists on the Central Board, and which was barely understood by Robert Owen'.[262] According to Keith Taylor, Owenite socialism had enjoyed

> popular support when it was able to mobilise artisans and skilled workers in co-operative organisations and trade unions. This was undoubtedly the "natural" socio-economic constituency for the growth of socialism. But Owenism became less successful as it moved away from that cultural basis into the realms of religious sectarianism and millenarianism.[263]

As it 'moved away' from the natural constituency of 'artisans and skilled workers', it moved away also from their sober secularism and towards religious eccentricity. W.H. Armytage similarly draws an

[261] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 68.
[262] Royle, 77.
[263] Taylor, 'Explaining the Origins of Socialism', 396.

association between the distance from trade unions and co-operativism and a retreat into religious millenarianism. When the first issue of the *New Moral World* was released in 1834 (having succeeded the *Crisis* as the movement's principal organ), its 'opening sentences struck a new millennial note' which 'marked Owen's emergence as a Utopist proper; his alliance with trade unions, co-operators and political reformers dissolved for ever'.[264] The imagined direction of causation in these accounts is not clear. Did the decreasing interest and involvement of sober 'artisans and skilled workers' allow the greater influence of more utopian and quasi-religious tendencies? Or was it instead the movement towards more utopian and quasi-religious activities which alienated that constituency?

Irrespective of the imagined causation, these accounts share an assumption that the working classes, the 'artisans and skilled workers', were resistant to any positive engagement with religious questions, either by dismissing the relevance of such questions or by challenging the authority of the orthodox answers. This assumption that the masses, urban, extracted from the nexus of squirearchy, and exposed to the callous predations of industrial capitalism, were hostile to religion has a rich pedigree. In his *The Condition of the Working Class in England,* Friedrich Engels claimed that 'among the masses there prevails almost universally a total indifference to religion, or at the utmost, some trace of Deism too undeveloped to amount to more than mere words, or a vague dread of the words infidel, atheist, etc.'.[265] Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm identifies the working classes as being marked, from the 1840s to 1950s, by 'an abnormal degree of religious indifferentism', such that, 'from the start, the 'characteristic "modern" form of working-class movement is thus purely, if not militantly, secular'.[266] He argues that '[s]ecularism [was] the ideological thread which binds London labour history together', and in virtue of which 'the labour and socialist movement is distinctively "modern"'.[267] According to Hobsbawm:

> the ideology of the new working class and socialist movements of the nineteenth century was secularist from the start…The mechanics of the 1820s followed Robert Owen not only for his analysis of capitalism, but for his unbelief, and, long after the collapse of Owenism, their *Halls of Science* spread rationalist propaganda through the cities. There have been and are

[264] Armytage, *Heavens Below*, 141.
[265] Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England.*
[266] Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 126; 127.
[267] Hobsbawm, 128; 127.

> religious socialists, and a very large number of men who, while religious, are also socialists. But the predominant ideology of modern labour the socialist movements, insofar as they claim one, is based on eighteenth-century rationalism.[268]

Of course, Hobsbawm notes, there were residues of the old ways which had not yet been shed, and some affection for the 'old religions' for which there was still 'a sort of nostalgia'. It would, after all, 'be incredible if the forms and fashions of traditional religion, which had enclosed the lives of the common people from time immemorial were to have suddenly and completely dropped away'.[269] There were 'a few unimportant exceptions' such as Wilhelm Weitling or the Saint-Simonians, but these were 'curious rather than important phenomena', a speckling of 'popular-archaic efforts'.[270] This included the 'labour sect' which emerged 'for want of anything better', because 'nobody taught them a better one', preceding more modern forms of organisation, before being 'easily absorbed into the general current of left-wing activity'. And these sects produced no theory, being merely 'the standard kind of Socialism, elaborated by secular thinkers, and translated into the familiar Biblical terminology'.[271] And this is all despite the fact that the Bible offered such a natural language of revolution and despite the fact that the majority of the people remained religious: 'the prevalent secularism of the new labour and socialist movements was based on the equally novel and more fundamental fact of the prevalent religious indifference of the new proletariat…there was no precedent for their remoteness from, ignorance of, and indifferent to organized religion'.[272] It is striking that Hobsbawm holds that while the majority of people remained religious, it is the new proletariat which are distinct, secular and indifferent. For Hobsbawm, it appears to be a kind of conceptual matter that to be a proletarian *is* to be indifferent to religion.

In such descriptions of the proletariat as essentially secular, there is not a complete neglect of the existence of the religious forms, impulses, and themes which Hobsbawm observes in the labour sect. However, their existence tends to be explained as having a source outside of the movement, among

[268] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, 270.
[269] Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 127.
[270] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, 270.
[271] Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 146–49.
[272] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, 271.

charismatic eccentrics imposing their idiosyncratic preoccupations or among capitalist paternalists seeking to enforce respectability.[273] Or as being promoted by the very poor, a reflection of their desperation, or as emerging from pre-modern, traditional influences, indicative of immaturity, which 'all serve to emphasise that it is premature, in the 1830s, to think of the English working class as being wholly open to secular ideology'.[274] Or, alternatively, as being motivated by merely instrumental or rhetorical concerns. Some Owenites were 'ironically borrowing from religious idioms to extend its message'.[275] Or 'very many radicals clearly felt a need to clothe their activities in a religious garb'.[276] Or the existence of socialist 'missionaries' is explained by the need, having been banned from halls, to brand oneself as a religious proselytiser in order to be eligible to lecture in religious establishments.[277] Alternatively, religious institutions and arguments are stepping stones which enable the transition to a more politically mature form of socialism. E.P. Thompson argues that Methodism, or 'any religion which places great emphasis on the after-life is the chiliasm of the defeated and the hopeless', and stands opposed to the development of effective political organisation.[278] Such forms of religiosity 'reappear with renewed fervour' when, and only when, political hopes have been defeated and former political actors turn away from this world in resignation and towards the consolations of the next life.[279]

In Section 2.2, I have identified and explained how interpretations of Owenite socialism have often neglected the prominence and creativity of religious engagement in the movement. I have argued that such neglect is frequently attributable to the ways in which Owenism has been understood as an episode in the history of socialism and trade unionism. I have shown how the Fabians sought to claim the Owenites as an ancestor. I then noted how other scholars have sought to identify the roots of Marxism or of trade unionism in Owenism, and argued that these scholars' interpretations of Owenism have been shaped by their conceptions of later Marxism and trade unionism. I then noted how the

[273] Engels, 'On the History of Early Christianity'; Royle, *Victorian Infidels*; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 877–83.
[274] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 882.
[275] Nash, 'Genealogies of Indifference?', 27.
[276] Prothero, *Artisans & Politics*, 263.
[277] Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"', 25.
[278] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 412–14.
[279] Thompson, 419–27.

emergence of socialism has often been tied to a vision of industrial modernisation and of a secular proletariat, and argued that such a vision has similarly contributed to scholarly neglect of the importance and creativity of religious engagement in Owenite socialism.

In Chapter 2, I have surveyed some existing scholarly accounts of the relationship between Owenite socialism and religion. I have noted that scholars have identified Owenites as determinedly anti-religious (Section 2.1.2), and as having borrowed practices or ideas from the Christian tradition such as millennialism, sectarianism, or Protestant communalism (Section 2.1.3). Next, I noted that scholars have identified the Owenites as having promoted a novel rational religion (Section 2.1.4). In Section 2.2, I then argued that because the Owenites have frequently been studied as part of a British socialist or labour history which is assumed to be dominated by secular considerations, their philosophical reflection upon religious questions has often been neglected. In Chapter 3, I will focus attention upon one particular Owenite engagement with the nature of religion.

Chapter 3: Reconceiving Religion

In the previous chapter, I noted that Owenites are frequently presented as 'infidels' who express hostility to religion, or as a 'millenarian sect', or as 'a kind of secular religion'.[1] Or Owenite socialism is understood to have a 'religious character' in virtue of its inheriting a tradition of Christian communitarianism and of its being a product of the 'redemptive burst of passionate, even quasi-millenarian if pseudo-Christian enthusiasm which burst forth in 1789'.[2] Owenites are depicted as borrowing rhetorically from contemporary religious traditions either in order to attract adherents, using 'secular morality which was construed as "religious" primarily insofar as this was an effective means of drawing away adherents from the various Christian churches'.[3] Or in order to articulate otherwise inarticulable aspirations for social transformation, as way of expressing 'an intensity of aspiration for which there was simply no secular vocabulary available'.[4] It is clear that there is a remarkable dissensus around the question of the relationship between Owenite socialism and 'religion'. To some extent, this tangle of interpretations can be understood as flowing from the nature of a large political movement which existed for several decades, with a decentralised branch structure which permitted philosophical differences, and a flexible ideology. Different interpretations can be generated by placing emphasis upon different temporal moments or upon different groups. However, such an appeal to historical complexity can take us only so far.

This chapter will take an alternative avenue into the debate about the relationship between Owenite socialism and 'religion', examining the ways in which Owenites themselves use the concept of 'religion' itself. In the interpretative accounts described in the previous chapter, there was an underlying assumption that there exists a relatively transparent and consistent sense of the concept 'religion' which is shared between Owenites, and which is also shared by modern scholars. It is assumed that when one describes Owenites as repudiating or borrowing from 'religion', that there is an intelligible, shared meaning of the term. Such an assumption is problematic for at least two reasons. The first is

[1] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*; Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 135; Lineham, 'Christian Minorities', 565.
[2] Claeys, 'Early Socialism as Intellectual History', 898–99.
[3] Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"', 25. See also Prothero, *Artisans & Politics*, 263.
[4] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 160.

that the concept may have experienced significant shifts in its usage and meaning over the past two centuries. The assumption seems especially dubious given the significant changes, including both the diversification and reduced social significance of religion, which have occurred in the religious landscape over the past two centuries. Given such changes, it would be surprising if the vocabulary used to interpret, understand, articulate, and shape those changes were to remain unaltered, with an enduring set of connotations and associations such that contemporary scholars and Owenites understand the term in roughly the same way. The second reason why this assumption is dubious is that the concept was itself a subject of contestation for Owenites, with disagreement about the nature of religion both within the movement and between the movement and its contemporaries. For example, in an 1835 lecture 'by one of the members of the Junior Council' of the AACAN which was printed in the *New Moral World*, 'religion' is described as being, in its 'purest form,…a system of blind belief, forced on the helpless and credulous mind of infancy', a denial of intellectual freedom.[5] Yet, in the following issue, an editorial informs readers that the 'religion of the Millennium' consists instead of the practice of promoting the happiness of all.[6] And soon thereafter, Kate[7] informs us that the 'Religion of the Millennium' consists in the cultivation of moral properties and the development of the human intellect so that each can come to see how their interests align with the common good.[8] Clustered together, in a small number of issues, are quite contrary sentiments about the nature of religion, whether an oppressive constraint upon human freedom and rationality, or as aiming at moral and intellectual development and the positive recognition of social interconnection.

Conceptual innovation is a process through which disagreement can be expressed, and political action taken. Altering the use of certain concepts, introducing new implications or definitions, can serve to shift understandings of what is tolerable or laudable, plausible or desirable. Presenting an alternative understanding of a concept is a political strategy and philosophical manoeuvre. In this case, the

[5] *New Moral World* no.2, 56, 'Lecture on "Millennial Prospects"' (21 November 1835), 29-31.
[6] *NMW* no.2, 57, 'The Religion of the Millennium' (28 November 1835), 33.
[7] 'Kate' was the pseudonym of socialist and feminist Catherine Barmby (née Watkins). Catherine Barmby was an important figure in the Communist Church which had been established by her husband, 'sacred socialist' John Goodwyn Barmby in 1841. Taylor, 'Barmby [Née Watkins], Catherine Isabella [Pseud. Kate]'. J.G. Barmby has been widely credited with the first use of the term 'communist' in English, borrowing the word from French in order to describe the followers of Étienne Cabet. Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 7.
[8] *NMW* no.2, 67, 'The Religion of the Millennium' – Kate (6 February 1836), 115-6.

promotion of a certain conception of 'religion' also involves demonstrating the role that it will play in the progress towards, and the future state of, socialism. In positively promoting this account, Owenites were also rejecting conventional rival accounts and challenging the traditional authority of certain ecclesiastical institutions to determine the boundaries of the domain of religion.

This chapter does not argue that there is a single, unified, unanimous Owenite account of 'religion'. Rather, I pick out a prominent and recurrent thread which rejects the isolation of religion from everyday life and instead promotes a vision of 'religion' as being a matter of morally laudable social relations and of 'social science'. Instead of 'religion' as a matter controlled by a professional clergy, and manifested through prayer or faith in the transcendent, religious practice involves labouring, acting well, and coming to learn about the world. Instead of religion being a matter of theological disputation and rarefied rites administered by clergy, instead, it is argued, religion is embodied in temporal works and knowledge of God is gained through the application of reason to the social and natural world. This suggestion that religion is expressed in everyday life is not intended in a metaphorical sense, as suggesting the *importance* of these activities, or the degree of *emotional investment* they provoke. Instead it conveys an understanding of God's works as being advanced by acting well, of divine favour attaching to works, and of religious knowledge as being gained through one's understanding of the world. Importantly, this re-conception of what religion essentially is does not suggest that it is of diminished importance. An increasing divergence from traditional Christian accounts of faith and of God's relationship with humans does not also entail reduced significance. It is wrong to assume that heterodoxy is a step towards secularism, or that the holding of unorthodox opinions implies that they are held weakly or insincerely. Instead, this account of 'religion' continues to hold that it is a source of moral orientation and authority.

In Section 3.1, I describe the process of conceptual innovation, justifying my examination of the concept of 'religion' (rather than, for example, 'Christianity'). In Section 3.2, I describe how religion is understood to be intimately related to knowledge about the world, either as providing an impetus for the advancement of human learning or as being grounded in a scientific account of the operations of the world. In both cases, this entails that religion is closely tied to the Owenite 'social science' of character formation. In Section 3.3, I describe how the concept of religion is understood to convey a

form of human solidarity which is necessary for the successful operation of communities. In Section 3.4, I explore the relationship between 'religion' and 'morality', and whether religion is primarily a matter of acting well. Each of these elements represents a different facet of a common Owenite understanding of the concept of 'religion', an understanding which is positively linked to the means and end of social change.

3.1 Conceptual Innovation

This section will discuss the nature and purpose of conceptual innovation, rejecting the suggestion that it is merely pragmatic, and describing the significance of innovation surrounding the concept of 'religion' rather than, for example, 'Christianity'. When considering the innovation surrounding the concept of 'religion', it is important to ask not only how and why the concept is altered, but also why the concept is *retained*. That is, not only why this concept is reconceived, but also why it is *this concept* rather than a different concept being altered or a new concept introduced. It will be argued throughout that the innovation surrounding religion is not intended to undermine its status or to dismiss its value, but instead to identify its morally weighty and socially significant presence in the achievement of social change and in the socialist future.

This chapter examines the ways in which Owenites deployed the concept of 'religion', but before doing so, it is necessary first to clarify the nature and object of conceptual innovation. Conceptual innovation is an attempt to re-describe the social and political world by shifting the range of reference, typical cases, or emotional valence of a term. Attempts to alter the ways in which concepts are used can be a matter of philosophical clarity or political strategy (or both). On occasion, this is an intentional strategy pursued by an individual who is clear and explicit about the motivation, grounds, and implications of the attempt. The examples here are familiar: the Marxist who argues that the infliction of harm by exploitative social and economic arrangements is a form of *violence*, or the philosopher who argues that lack of money is an instance of *unfreedom* or that it is a special kind of *injustice* when one is

wronged in one's capacity as a knower.[9] In these cases, an important normative concept is being extended to cover new cases, harnessing the social or philosophical power of that concept in order to shift the moral landscape. Concepts such as violence, freedom, and justice all demand a certain recognition and response, and these attempts at conceptual innovation seek to argue that it is philosophically necessary or politically important that they should be used to describe new cases. However, most of the instances of conceptual change studied by historians of political thought are not so discrete and clear, nor are they pursued by individuals in this way. Instead, they tend to occur in more subtle and gradual ways, in ways which are often uncoordinated and obscure.

The study of the changing usage of political concepts has its own rich and methodologically diverse heritage. This includes the 'unit ideas' approach of Arthur Lovejoy which focused upon those most basic ideas which were believed to be the foundations of political theories, and the *Begriffsgeschichte* school gathered around Reinhart Koselleck which seeks to produce a dictionary of the shifting ways that concepts have been used through time.[10] However, in this chapter I am interested less in charting the diachronic usage of the concept of 'religion', than in how that concept was used in one historical moment, and how that usage reflects something about early socialist politics. I will therefore look to a methodological lens which focuses particularly on conceptual change as political action. This is a fact to which practitioners of linguistic contextualism have tended to be attuned, drawing attention to the way in which one usage of a concept fits into a wider context of possible and existing usages. This is the question of whether an agent is speaking or writing in ways that would have been expected, whether usage follows or deviates from existing conventions, and what the political upshot of that following or deviating is. Linguistic contextualists such as Quentin Skinner stress the importance of understanding the contemporaneous conventions, 'the established assumptions and expectations of a given culture', which provide the linguistic context for any text, and allow one to understand whether that text affirms or defies those conventions.[11] It is necessary to distinguish the ways in which Owenites used certain terms from the ways in which their contemporaries did in order to understand that usage. There is, of course, a long history in changing usage of the concept of 'religion', including

[9] Harris, 'The Marxist Conception of Violence'; Cohen, 'Freedom and Money'; Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.
[10] Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 3–23; Richter, 'Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Ideas'.
[11] Skinner, '"Social Meaning" and the Explanation of Social Action', 142.

Aquinas, Jerome, Augustine, and Calvin, but this cannot serve as the relevant linguistic context when it was a heritage of which Owenites were (seemingly) not aware.[12] For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient to note that a traditional conception of religion as an attitude of inner piety had been supplanted during the seventeenth century. Religion came to be conceived instead as a set of objectively defined propositional beliefs and practices, and both the definite article (*'the* Christian religion') and the plural ('religions') came to be used. This was a usage which stabilised soon after and was still hegemonic in the early nineteenth century.[13]

In this chapter, the emphasis will be upon patterns of usage in Owenite discourse rather than upon any specific individual participants. Evidence will be drawn primarily from the Owenite press, and particularly the *New Moral World*, the central organ of Owenite socialism between 1834 and 1845. Journals such as the *New Moral World* were the primary forum for the propagation and distribution of Owenite philosophy, and for its dynamic negotiation by members; these journals welcomed letters on a variety of topics, and their pages offered a space for ongoing discussion. Most of those who wrote to Owenite journals used pseudonyms, favouring classical names which may have been intended to project an air of learning (Aristides, Philanthropos[14], Omega, Omicron, Vulneratus), to reflect their social status ('An Elector'), or to express their affiliation to the movement ('A Socialist', 'A Young Socialist of Bradford', 'A Disciple in the Cause'). Others signed letters and articles with initials, but it is not always clear whether they did so to conceal their identity or because their identity was so obvious (anyone familiar with the movement would have recognised that 'G.J.H.' was George Jacob Holyoake). It is important to emphasise that most contributors were not professional writers, but members of the working class; biographical information about them is limited and they lack a large corpus of work in which ideas are extensively developed or interrogated. Some are prolific, authoring ten or fifteen articles in a year, but most have a more limited output, writing only occasionally. Many flit into and out of the movement, writing or lecturing frequently for a year and then never reappearing. These were individuals who were exposed to the pressures from which affluent philosophers tend to be insulated: unemployment or unstable work, or occasional poverty. In virtue of the nature of this

[12] For such an account, see, for example, Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion*, 7–13.
[13] Harrison, 83–116.
[14] John Minter Morgan.

evidence, with large quantities of material of which the author is unidentifiable or largely unknown, and in virtue of the nature of the movement, with many participants making small contributions, this chapter will focus upon Owenite discourse as an ideology which was produced collectively, in which patterns of usage of concepts such as 'religion' can be traced. Instead of focusing upon particular, prominent actors, this chapter will instead examine the collective reimagination of the concept of 'religion'.

Quentin Skinner provides an excellent account of the mechanics of conceptual change, and of the way in which that conceptual change connects to wider political objectives. Skinner identifies in sixteenth century merchants a class of 'innovating ideologists' who sought to shift the existing conceptual vocabulary in order to legitimise certain social transformations. Previously, accumulating wealth by serving as an intermediary in the exchange of goods had been perceived to be suspicious and tawdry, and the manipulation of language around its description was an important mechanism of its legitimation. Skinner identifies two broad processes. The first was to alter the positive or negative connotations attaching to a term. Words like 'shrewdness', which had previously been only condemnatory came, in sixteenth century England to be associated with the approval of commercial good sense. Other terms, like 'obsequious', which had previously held positive connotations in a context of ordered hierarchy came instead to have a critical edge. The second process was the manipulation of the criteria for the application of terms, so that they retained their disapprobatory or laudatory force but were applied to more or different cases. Among those seeking to present early modern commerce as being approved by Protestantism, successful traders were described as 'provident' or as manifesting a 'religious' commitment to their labour. In each case, a positive evaluative term is applicable to new cases.[15] Skinner draws his examples from the early modern period, identifying successful instances of conceptual change, which involve socially influential 'innovating ideologists' legitimating conduct which precedes the conceptual shift.

By contrast, the Owenites under examination in this chapter were not originating novel conceptions of religion, nor did they achieve a wider societal adoption of their understanding of the concept.

[15] Skinner, 'Moral Principles and Social Change', 149–54.

However, Skinner's emphasis upon the *political* dimension of conceptual change is clearly relevant. If conceptual change involves attempts to co-opt available resources of legitimation in order to positively re-describe certain actions or objects, then there were incentives for Owenites to seek to alter the meaning of 'religion'. They were frequently denounced as 'irreligious' or 'infidels' or condemned as immoral and licentious in virtue of their perceived repudiation of religion.[16] Some regarded this as a fruitful source of publicity, but it was also a serious impediment to widespread endorsement in a context of religious observance.[17] It might then have been a helpful tactic to be able to defuse accusations of being 'irreligious' by challenging conceptions of what 'religion' is. Prospective recruits would have their concerns assuaged, an adequate defence could be offered against critical clergymen, and there would be no need for any substantive philosophical or ideological change. One might be led towards such an account by Richard Ashcraft's argument that Owenite radicals were primarily political actors rather than philosophers, who pursued strategic objectives and sought to produce a persuasive message rather than reflecting deeply or valuing philosophical clarity.[18] And one can witness such defensive redeployment of religious vocabulary when an editorial in the *New Moral World* replies to a Worcester critic 'Mr Gutch', who had condemned socialism as irreligious. Their response is that

> our religion is a religion of deeds, not words; of charity, not faith; of love, unity, and mutual help, not hate, division, and competition; and that the charity so beautifully eulogised by St. Paul is a necessary emanation from the fundamental principle of the social system [of the formation of character]…if *fidelity to Christ's religion* consists in loving all our fellow men, then are we *faithful*. If a belief in the goodness and improvable nature of man, similar to his who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," be no scepticism, then are we no *sceptics*. If religion consists in *doing* instead of *talking*, in *loving* not *hating*, in *co-operating* not *competing*, then are we *religious*.[19]

[16] See, for example, Bannister and Campbell, *Socialism. Public Discussion...[on] January 14, 15, & 16, 1839*; Brindley, *Public Discussion...on the Evenings of January 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1841*.
[17] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 212–18; Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites', 6.
[18] Ashcraft, 'Liberal Political Theory and Working-Class Radicalism', 265–66.
[19] *NMW* no.4, 199, 'Reply to Mr. Gutch' (18 August 1838), 343-4.

Drawing upon St. Paul's account of charity and Jesus Christ's invitation to 'little children', the *New Moral World* adopts the conventional language of Christianity: celebrating faith, fidelity and religiosity, and rejecting scepticism.[20] It does so in a defensive rebuttal of the charge lain by 'Mr. Gutch' that socialism is 'irreligious', appropriating and redirecting the traditional markers of religious virtue in order to reject this challenge. The question of whether conceptual change is *merely* pragmatic is important because it raises the issue of whether it reflects upon the nature of Owenite socialism. If Owenites presented an alternative understanding of what 'religion' essentially is only because doing so insulated them from criticism, then there is no reason to think that such an understanding would cohere with the philosophy of Owenite socialism. There is no reason to think that it would shed light upon other commitments or conceptions of the world, it would merely be an effective strategic manoeuvre.

However, an explanation of conceptual innovation around 'religion' as *merely* pragmatic is inadequate for three reasons. First, it is not clear that offering esoteric or innovative conceptions of the nature of religion would have been thought to represent a persuasive response to a criticism of being theologically heterodox. Second, much of the conceptual innovation surrounding 'religion' does not serve the goal of describing Owenites as themselves engaging in 'religious' activities in the way one would expect were it aimed simply as self-legitimation. Third, it does not explain why conceptual innovation refers to the general category of 'religion' rather than the more particular 'Christianity'. Characterisation of one's own actions in the latter terms would have been likely to be more mollifying for critics, and so more strategically efficacious. Owenite conceptual innovation around the term 'religion' is not merely pragmatic.

This chapter focuses upon the Owenite engagement with the concept of 'religion' rather than with, for example, 'Christianity'.[21] This is not because there is an absence of reflection upon Christianity, but because the engagement with 'religion' was both more distinctive and more fundamental. Evaluation of contemporary social relations and of political institutions according to their fidelity to

[20] 1 Corinthians 13; Matthew 19:14.
[21] There are, of course, occasions on which the term 'religion' is being used as a synonym for 'Christianity', or even for 'the theology and practice of the Anglican church in the early nineteenth century'.

Christian dictates is a limited inquiry. It remains attached to the evidence of scripture, and to its interpretation as the mechanism of arbitration, and wedded to the question of whether something is authentically Christian. By contrast, engagement with the concept of 'religion' is more basic, involving reflection upon a category of experience, and its relationship to social transformation. It is this engagement which demarcates Owenites from their contemporaries. Examining this engagement is therefore more revealing about the distinctive enterprise in which Owenites were participating. Further, tracing the usage of the concept of 'religion' offers an avenue into the other interconnected concepts in this semantic field. And because it is addressed in an explicit and direct way, it is easier to explore than related terms such as the 'sacred' or the 'divine'. None of this is to say that Owenites were uninterested in the corruption of the contemporary Church. They made complaints about the wealth and comfort of the clergy in contrast to the poverty of many of their parishioners, the 'unchristian' participation of priests in the persecution of socialists, and the incapacity of the Church to encourage virtuous behaviour.[22] But this was not an argument which set them aside from contemporaries. Chartists would frequently bemoan that the Church was betraying the Christian tradition, and sought to expose this betrayal by occupying churches and demanding that the minister preach on sympathetic biblical texts such as the exhortation that '[i]f any will not work, neither shall he eat'.[23] It was not uncommon to identify the corruption and hypocrisy of the Church, for example, the wealth of bishops or the abuse of absenteeism, in which a minister would be incumbent in several parishes, collecting payments but rarely visiting.[24] Dissenters also had their own significant grievances, complaining about their obligation to pay church rates, and about restrictions on where they could marry and be buried.[25] Reflection upon the nature of religion is more abstract than these challenges about the extent to which the existing Church was truly Christian; it manifests a concern with the existence of an independent sphere of values and activities rather than with the narrower matter of Christianity and the Christian ethical tradition. Remaining cognisant of this distinction is important

[22] *NMW* no.6, 58, 'The Sabbath' – J.E.S. (30 November 1839), 916-7; *NMW* no.6, 60, 'Christian Charity Exemplified' - J. Hall (14 December 1839), 958; *NMW* no.6, 58, 'On the Existence…' - X (30 November 1839), 917-9.
[23] 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 334–36; Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit*.
[24] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 32–36.
[25] Chadwick, 79–81.

because it is easy to confuse critiques of the contemporary Church. For example, one might allege that contemporary religious institutions are immoral and irrational, perhaps in virtue of the conduct of missionaries or their nurturance of sectarian animosity.[26] Yet, such allegations can have very different implications. It might be that contemporary religious institutions are immoral and irrational, and that this is because all religion is immoral and irrational. Or it might be that while these religious institutions are immoral and irrational, other forms of religion are moral and rational. Or, alternatively that so immoral and irrational are these institutions that they cease to be religious, ceasing to qualify as religious because religion is moral and rational. The same substantive critique of the Church could have drastically different implications given alternative assumptions about what religion was, and how the Church represented, or did not represent, 'religion'.

The concept of 'religion' is directly examined, and divergent implicit understandings of its nature revealed, when the question is raised of the 'religion of the new moral world' or the 'religion of the Millennium'. This was a question which was frequently discussed by Owenites; it was often the subject of lectures, it was debated at Congresses, and it was raised critically by rival periodicals and interlocutors at meetings.[27] Tracts and pamphlets were written to examine the question: *The Religion of the New Moral World* was published by the National Community Friendly Society in 1836, and *The Religion of the Millennium* by 'Kate' was serialised in the *New Moral World* and subsequently sold as a pamphlet.[28] While Owenites and their critics alike both focus upon the question of the religion of the future, when they do so it is clear that they have different operative understandings of the concept of 'religion'. For critics, the question refers to the mechanics of religious institutions, whether there would be religious tests for admission, whether there would be a single theology, or how different denominations might be accommodated within a community. In asking the question they seek the expression of a denominational identity or for specific answers on the theological controversies of the day. These critics ask what role 'religion' would play in an imagined network of socialist communities, and their conception of what qualifies as a valid example of 'religion' is clearly conditioned by their

[26] For example, *NMW* no.8, 24, 'What is the Use of Religion?' (12 December 1840), 376-7.
[27] See, for example, *NMW* no.2, 82, 'Resolutions Unanimously Adopted…' (21 May 1836), 236-7; *NMW* no. 4, 181, 'Mr. Green' lecturing at Stalybridge (14 April 1838), 196; *NMW* no. 10, 11, 'Discussion Between Mr. Jeffrey S.M. and Rev. A. Harvey' – N (11 September 1841), 83.
[28] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 185.

experiences of contemporary Christianity. When they ask about the 'religion' of the new moral world, they are asking about those features which typify Christianity: formalised institutions, a codified theology including an account of God's nature, and a clear moral code.

However, the ways in which Owenites engage with this question suggest that they have a rival understanding of what qualifies as an instance of 'religion' and so what they conceive 'religion' to be. Only very rarely is information offered about sites of worship, denominations, or services, those features which many contemporaries took to determine the content of what a religion was. Owenite responses tend to make no references to the usual ingredients of religion, to ritual, practices, or precise theological beliefs, instead noting that the religion of the new moral world will be the practice of promoting the happiness of all or of 'augment[ing] the sum of human happiness'.[29] Most frequently, it is insisted that:

> The Religion of the New Moral World, consists in the unceasing practice of promoting the happiness of every man, woman, and child, to the greatest extent in our power, without regard to their class, sect, party, country, or colour.[30]

Instead of 'religion' referring to a specific and narrow theology, to practices or rites, it refers to the impartial promotion of happiness. As well as offering a description of the 'Religion of the New Moral World', these answers also reflect an implicit understanding of what the category of religion is, a conception of what *counts* as an answer to this question, and so also what religion *is*.

Examination of the nature of religion requires the identification of those features which are perceived to typify existing examples of religion: Christian denominations, Islam, Hinduism, and 'natural religion'.[31] This involves abstracting from concrete instances of religion, distinguishing between that which is contingent or corrupting and that which is essential or fundamental in those instances. Such

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[29] *NMW* no.2, 57, 'The Religion of the Millennium' (28 November 1835), 33; *NMW* no.8, 20, 'Praise and Blame' – A Foe to Ambition (21 November), 326.
[30] *NMW* no.2, 82 'The Religion of the New Moral World' (21 May 1836), 237.
[31] *NMW* no.11, 33, 'Progress' - M (11 February 1843), 267. In this period, clusters of practices and beliefs were coming to be conceptualised in the Western imagination as 'Eastern religions', including 'Boudhism' in 1821, 'Hindooism' in 1829. There was also a long-standing interest in the faiths of Ancient Greece and Rome, and a renewed interest in Celtic, Germanic, and Slavonic pre-Christian religions which was associated with the Romantic movement. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism*; Maier, 'Other Religions'.

a pursuit of the general features of 'religion' can be witnessed in the reply of the *New Moral World* to a letter from 'A Freeman of Exeter' (a frequent correspondent in 1839-40). The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists had been formed earlier that year (in May 1839), and 'A Freeman of Exeter' raises the question of whether Owenites should understand themselves as 'rational religionists' or rather as 'practical Christians'.[32] The *New Moral World* advocates for the former, arguing that it avoids the parochialism of an association with any particular faith while retaining the connection to those aspects of Christianity which are valuable. If Owenites were to name themselves 'practical Christians', then this would lead to complications when socialism spread across the world and was adopted by those of other faiths, with the multiplication of groups of 'practical Mahometans' or 'practical Hindoos'. Further, the feature of Christianity with which Owenites were associating themselves was its moral code, and this 'self-same morality which is found in the New Testament is also embodied in the sacred books of the Chinese, the Hindoos, the Mahometans'.[33] This common morality is identified as the feature shared among these religions and as the essential core of religion, in contrast with the contingent mystical elements added by each particular faith.

Interpretations of Owenite socialism have tended to emphasise its repudiation of, indifference to, appropriation of, or similarity to, religion. Instead, here I describe how Owenites offer a re-conception of the nature of religion, a re-conception in which religion is understood to be intimately connected to socialism. Further, in describing this re-conception, I seek to show that various scholars have recognised a partial aspect of Owenite socialism. Those interpretations which argue that Owenite socialism repudiates religion focus upon the Owenite rejection of a sacerdotal, hierarchical church which preaches worldly acquiescence and obstructs the progress of natural and social science. Yet, this rejection of aspects of the contemporary Church should not be conflated with an understanding of religion as enjoying diminished status. And those which present Owenite socialism as having 'religious' qualities recognise that the Owenite conception of religion shares significant features with their socialism: the emphasis upon the moralisation of human relations and the importance of the progress of natural and social science.

[32] *NMW* no.6, 53, Reply to 'A Freeman of Exeter' (26 October 1839), 838.
[33] *NMW* no.6, 53, Reply to 'A Freeman of Exeter' (26 October 1839), 838.

One distinctive feature of this re-conception of religion is in the way in which Owenites reduce the distance between religion and other practices or spheres of life, such as ethics, social solidarity, or scientific knowledge. They present 'religion' in a way which emphasises not a sui generis or transcendent character, but rather which stresses its proximity to other kinds of human endeavour. Strikingly, this Owenite account of religion is entirely contrary to the understanding which is operative among scholars of political religion who describe the 'sacralisation' of the state, of politics, or of the collectivity.[34] These accounts, which have focused especially on the totalitarian regimes of the mid-twentieth century in Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union, trade upon an understanding of the sacred realm of religion as having a distinctive force and character which is appropriated by, or imposed upon, the routine world of politics. Emphasis is lain upon those features which are purported to demarcate the religious realm as exceptional: its focus upon salvation, grand historical narrative, or self-proclaimed epistemic and moral hegemony over other fields of endeavour. And it is the appeal to these exceptional features which is supposed to endow the label of 'political religion' with its dramatic force. Emilio Gentile described Italian fascism as a political *religion* in virtue of its 'all-consuming' conception of politics which aimed at 'abolishing the boundaries between the religious and political spheres'.[35] He also emphasised the rich symbolism of death and resurrection, of prophets and apostles, of an absolute commitment to the nation, and a narrative of the revival of the Roman Empire.[36] Further, fascism 'tried to give an answer to the problem of death through the exaltation of a sense of community, which integrated the individual into the collectivity'.[37] Eric Voegelin, writing amidst (and about) the rise of National Socialism in Germany, identified political religions as first emerging at the end of the Middle Ages following the breakdown of Christian community. He described them as 'religions' in virtue of their adoption of the ideas of apocalypse and of a struggle between good and evil, and of their transposing the quality of divinity onto the state.[38] The understanding of 'religion' is of a phenomenon which is elevated above, and uncompromisingly rules over, other spheres of life,

[34] Gentile, 'Fascism as Political Religion'; te Velde, 'The Religious Side of Democracy'; Voegelin, 'The Political Religions'.
[35] Gentile, 'Fascism as Political Religion', 230–31.
[36] Gentile, 233–43.
[37] Gentile, 244.
[38] Voegelin, 'The Political Religions', 18–74.

which proclaims a grand historical narrative. Emphasis is upon the transcendent and eschatological; the analogy between politics and religion is intended to elucidate the predominance of faith over reason, the absolute primacy of politics over private life, the Manichean worldview, and the expectation of total social renewal. When these accounts apply the terminology of 'religion' (and associated vocabulary such as 'sacralisation') to politics, they do so in order to describe and explain the emotional appeals, irrationalism, or narratives of cataclysm and revival of certain totalitarian regimes. Although the 'political religions' tradition is of diminished importance today, this still represents a prominent lens through which the relationship between religion and politics is viewed. By contrast, Owenite socialists often present religion less as exceptional, and instead as continuous with other more seemingly mundane dimensions of human existence: as ethical behaviour, as tied to other forms of knowledge, as a source of solidarity. Instead of being transcendent, religion is instead temporal, manifesting in human interactions or furthered in scientific inquiry.

One might suggest that this Owenite conception of religion as linked to temporal works and worldly knowledge is evidence of a more 'secular' consciousness, another gradual step away from a concern with a personal, spiritual, transcendent God and towards a denial of any active participation of the divine in the world. Such a suggestion would tally with the appraisal of, for example, historian of early socialism Gregory Claeys, who argues that the emergence of Owenism brought forth an 'essentially secular' economic socialism which offered arguments 'no longer theological, but resting upon deistic and sometimes atheistic principles, inevitably secular'.[39] However, this suggestion rests upon an equivocation on the concept of the 'secular'. The term entered the English language in the late Middle Ages in order to distinguish between secular and religious clergy in the Catholic Church.[40] While the secular clergy participated in the temporal world, interacting with the laity, conducting services, and taking an interest in worldly concerns, the religious clergy lived cloistered and isolated monastic lives, remaining apart from the world. This distinction marks a contrast between those members of the clergy who participate in worldly affairs and those who do not, and does not suggest that one is, and the other is not, truly 'religious'. By contrast, a more recent sense of the term 'secular' is as referring

[39] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 42; Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 33.
[40] Berlinerblau, 'Political Secularism', 86–88; Hölscher, 'The Religious and the Secular', 37–39.

to those areas of life over which religion has limited influence and authority. It demarcates those matters which are free from the influence of religion. While the first sense of 'secular' denotes those clergy who are also involved in the temporal world, the second sense of the term describes the irrelevance of religion. It is by conflating these two senses that one can most readily move from a conception of religious virtue as linked to temporal works to an understanding that religion is thereby of reduced significance, using evidence that Owenites are 'secular' in the first sense to advance the argument that they are 'secular' in the second sense. Recognising the distinction between this original and the more modern sense of 'secular' encourages us to reject the assumption that the Owenite conception of 'religion' is a step towards a denial of the importance of divine participation in the world.

In this section, I have introduced the understanding of conceptual change which will inform this chapter. I have discussed the motivations surrounding conceptual innovation and rejected the idea that this was *merely* pragmatic. I then justified my selection of the term 'religion' as the object of study in this chapter, rather than, for example, 'Christianity' or other related terms such as the 'sacred' or 'divine'. I introduced my account of a prominent Owenite understanding of 'religion', noted how this differs strikingly from the deployment of the concept in the 'political religions' tradition and rejected the suggestion that such an understanding of 'religion' was reflective of the movement being 'secularising'.

3.2 Religion and Knowledge

Throughout the socialist tradition there has been an understanding of socialism as grounded in knowledge about the world, whether the analytical science of social evaluation or the technological preconditions for production. This association between 'socialism' and 'science' is not limited to Marxian 'scientific socialism' or to the historical materialism that orthodox Marxists such as Georgi Plekhanov were to help raise to the status of a science.[41] Jonathan Beecher argues that it was one of

[41] Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

the main features of the 'romantic socialists' that they presented their views as 'an exact science—a science of social organization'.[42] These 'romantic socialists' included Henri Saint-Simon, and Charles Fourier, who frequently anointed himself 'the successor of Newton, the "inventor" of the "new science" of passionate attraction'.[43] Scholarship of Owenism has noted the prominence of science in the movement's newspapers, with regular articles in the *New Moral World* on 'geological discoveries, systematic botany, [and] the theory of electricity'.[44] And the role of science in Owen's own thought, with the development of technology to increase productivity and the sciences of 'man' and of society helping to make the socialist future 'accessible'.[45] It is not unusual for scholars of socialism to draw links between the interest in science and attitude towards religion, but these tend to be imprecise and under-argued, such as Gareth Stedman Jones' claim that early socialism is a 'science-based, post-Christian religion'.[46]

In this section, I will describe how Owenites offer an account of the relationship between religion and knowledge of the natural and social world. Religion is presented as both the source of the desire to learn about the world which motivates the advancement of knowledge, and as itself being rooted in the existing state of scientific learning. In this account, religion is recognised as being progressive, either motivating, or being grounded in, the advancement of knowledge, as being socially valuable, and as being positive connected to the socialist endeavour.

One innovative understanding of religion which ties the subject to Owenite socialism conceives a religious feeling as underlying the attempt to learn about the world. The conviction that there was a certain continuity between knowledge of God and knowledge of the workings of the natural world was widely shared in early nineteenth century Britain; the assumption of a 'unity of theological and physical truth' was a 'fundamental conviction of the age'.[47] Writing in the *New Moral World*, Owenite author 'A Student in Realities'[48] describes the 'religious feeling' as being the 'instinctive wish to know',

[42] Beecher, 'Early European Socialism', 373.
[43] Beecher, *Charles Fourier*, 9; Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists*, 39–68.
[44] Jones, 'Alfred Russel Wallace, Robert Owen and the Theory of Natural Selection', 80fn35.
[45] Leopold, 'Scientific Socialism', 193–200.
[46] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 187.
[47] Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion*, 150.
[48] 'A Student in Realities' was also the pseudonym adopted by the author of A Student in Realities, *Serious Thoughts Generated by Perusing Lord Brougham's...* and they are almost certainly the same writer, with similar language, and

a universal and basic impulse which is manifested in religious endeavours.[49] On 'A Student in Realities"s account, to be religious is to manifest that desire to learn about the world, and so the religious impulse may be identified in scientific, philosophical or educational pursuits. This ties 'religion' to Owenite culture and to the Owenite theory of social change in virtue of the way in which they draw upon an instinctive desire to know. 'A Student in Realities' argues, further, that many contemporary instances of religion cultivate the false idea that there is an external source for the human desire to understand, and so they distract from the true nature of religion. These contemporary religions misattribute the human instinct to understand, which is an 'organic feeling *within*' and the true 'REALITY' of religion, to an 'IDEALITY', something 'imagined *without*'. Contemporary religions are a perversion of the religious feeling, directing attention towards an imagined, external presence rather than the internal, instinctive source of the religious feeling. Instead, the religious feeling is that which provides a stimulus towards contemplation and investigation, which provides an impetus for human intellectual progress.

Having offered an account of the nature of the 'religious feeling', 'A Student in Realities' raises a challenge to orthodox Christians. He argues that 'we are much more religious than you ever were' because our 'doctrines have…a religious sanction since we have, like all other men, the religious feeling, or *instinctive wish* to *know* and to improve that REAL ORGANIC FOUNDATION of ALL RELIGIOUS FAITH'. Owenite social science enjoys 'religious' legitimation in virtue of its expression of that '*instinctive wish* to *know*'.[50] Those contemporaries who accuse Owenites of seeking to undermine or extinguish religion are wrong; socialists seek to nurture the religious feeling by 'real knowledge, and by real practice'.[51] As 'A Student in Realities' explains in a latter article, this practice involves the establishment of rational schools, founded upon the 'revelations' of geology and physiology, and teaching all positive sciences and useful arts. Such an education will seek to 'unit[e] all the useful and

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the repetition of certain passages (see, for example, v3, 159 and *NMW* no.4, 207, (13 October 1838) 409). New York journal the *Knickerbocker* suggests that the author is 'a sometime correspondent of this Magazine', American chemist and physician Samuel Lytler Metcalfe. *Knickerbocker* no. 18, 2 'Literary Notices' (August 1841), 158. Metcalfe had made research trips to England in 1831 and 1833-45, and he had written respected works on 'caloric' and 'terrestrial magnetism', reflecting that he was another example of an Owenite with serious scientific interests. Watanabe, 'The Caloric Theory of S. L. Metcalfe', 210.

[49] *NMW* no.4, 207, 'To the Calumniators of Socialism' - 'A Student in Realities' (13 October 1838), 409-11.

[50] See also, for example, Bailey, *Preliminary Discourse on the Objects, Pleasures and Advantages*, 29.

[51] *NMW* no.4, 207, 'To the Calumniators of Socialism' - A Student in Realities (13 October 1838), 409-11.

entertaining knowledge of the age, into a rational progressive religion on the principle that ALL is in ALL, and that nothing can stand alone'.[52] This account of the religious feeling as an 'instinctive wish to know' identifies Owenism as instantiating that religious impulse. This offers legitimation of both Owenite practice, which includes the establishment of 'rational schools' and the promotion of education, and Owenite philosophy, which offers an accurate account of human nature.

This conception of religion is positively linked to the self-conceptions of Owenite socialists in virtue of the importance of education in both Owenite culture and in the Owenite theory of political change. Educational activities were a fundamental aspect of the movement's culture, and many were involved with the movement precisely because it promoted the 'self-help and education of the working classes'.[53] The movement had been associated with education from its very beginning, with Robert Owen's New Lanark mills having become famous for their pioneering infant schools. And, fittingly, after the disbanding of Queenwood in 1845 brought a close to organised Owenism, the community's central Hall became a school.[54] The Owenite vision of education was not limited to childhood, but understood expansively to take place across one's life, and the Owenite Halls of Science hosted lectures and classes open to socialists of all ages.[55] If it is the case that religion manifests a desire for knowledge, then this suggests that Halls of Science, and other Owenite educational institutions, offer opportunities for the expression and satiation of this desire. Owenites also argued that education was to be the motor for political change, the 'steam engine of the new moral world'.[56] Education would be the mechanism by which socialists could take control of the circumstances which formed the character of humanity, and to 'end the unconscious determination of character by circumstances'.[57] It would be education which would allow the cultivation of cooperative socialists, who would be disposed to be charitable, who would display no selfishness or greed, and who could live in communities. According to George A. Fleming, the editor of the *New Moral World* in 1841:

[52] *NMW* no.6, 50, 'Causes of Political Difficulties...' - A Student in Realities (5 October 1839), 789.
[53] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 71.
[54] Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, 211–22.
[55] Thompson, *The People's Science*, 58–60; Shapin and Barnes, 'Science, Nature and Control'.
[56] Harrison, 'The Steam Engine of the New Moral World'.
[57] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 114.

> Education, in the most correct and extended sense of the term, constitutes the Alpha and Omega of the Social reformer's philosophy. It is the lever by which he hopes to raise mankind from their present anomalous, and, in too many instances, degraded position.[58]

The invocation of 'Alpha and Omega' is a clear allusion to the self-description of God in the Book of Revelation (verses 1:8, 21:6, and 22:13). And Fleming's editorial goes on to argue that not only is education the 'lever' by which change can be achieved, but that the success of education demonstrates 'the truth of the leading principles of Socialism'. If 'religion' encompasses the desire to learn, then it has an especial relevance to Owenite theory and practice. It characterises exactly that impulse which motivates Owenite educational endeavours, and refers to the mechanism through which social change is to be achieved. Given this, it is understandable that 'A Rational Religionist' describes how hundreds of towns are 'erecting their new churches by the weekly pence of the people, under the new designation of Halls of Science'.[59] If one understands previous religious organisations as having been superseded in the unfolding of the desire for knowledge, then Halls of Science appear to represent replacement churches, succeeding religious sites. Further, according to 'A Disciple of Truth', the 'men of science are the priests of this religion or revelation'. Unlike the existing clergy, however, their interpretations of revelation produce true knowledge rather than provoking endless division and disagreement.[60]

This conception of Halls of Science as being 'new churches' and 'men of science' as the new priests reflects another aspect of the re-conception of religion: of religion as a progressive phenomenon which is subject to development through human history. And it is conceived to be subject to progressive development precisely because it is connected to human knowledge about the world. Technological and scientific advances demonstrated how human knowledge about the world was developing, and it was assumed that if religious knowledge was continuous with other ways of knowing about the world, then it would be subject to the same progressive tendency. As 'Aristides' asks, if a human is an 'animal constantly learning', as we are told with regards to scientific and technological progress, why would humans' religious feeling not also make similar steps?'[61] As one comes to a greater understanding of

[58] *NMW* no.9, 14, 'A Few Hours at Norwood School of Industry' (3 April 1841), 203.
[59] *NMW* no.7, 77, 'The True Christianity' - A Rational Religionist (11 April 1840), 1231-2.
[60] *NMW* no.4, 174, 'An Address to All Who Profess…' – 'A Disciple of Truth' (24 February 1838), 142.
[61] *NMW* no.8, 20 'Social Bond of Union' – Aristides (14 November 1840), 305-6.

the world, new incarnations of religion will emerge in a pattern of development. This links particular instances of religion to corresponding stages of political, social, economic, or intellectual development. This conception of religion as a gradually unfolding phenomenon, subject to the same progression as other kinds of human knowledge, is connected with a common historical perspective among Owenites of social development progressing through stages in which political institutions, economic arrangements, technological progress, and intellectual development were interrelated.[62] Particular instances of a progressively developing religion correspond to different stages of development and become outdated with civilisational progress, yet underlying these instances is the progressively unfolding heart of religion. Individual incarnations of religion are 'stationary doctrines', temporary truths which are appropriate for their own age, but which are wrongly lauded as eternal and come to be obsolete as development continues.[63] True religion consists not in attachment to a particular theology or 'stationary doctrine', but in the growth of human understanding.

In a series of articles on 'The True Philosophy of all Mysterious Dogmas: Or the Natural Origin of all Religions', V.CL identifies an underlying 'religious feeling' from which the various incarnations and denominations of religion emerge; religious feeling is the 'WANT to KNOW; it is an unconscious thirst after knowledge'.[64] However, unlike 'A Student in Realities', V.CL's emphasis is upon the way in which this feeling endows religion itself with an impetus to further development. She describes how there is a human instinct which moves us to further exploration and which is 'designated by the expressive terms *religious fibre* and MSYTIC [sic] SENSE'.[65] The 'thirst after knowledge' sees religion subject to progressive development, and previous incarnations, which had been suitable to their own era, have since become redundant. Among 'primitive' societies, there was an insufficiency of scientific knowledge and religious feeling was manifest in theological dogma and superstition. However, this

[62] Lewis Masquerier identifies a 'savage' stage followed by an 'agricultural and manufacturing' stage typified by private property, the progress of art and science, and increasing inequality. This will be followed by the 'cooperative and equalizing form of society'. *NMW* no.10, 15, 'Cause of Evil' - Lewis Masquerier (9 October 1841), 113-4. Samuel Austin describes how the society of the 'savage' is superseded by that of the 'shepherd', then increasing productivity brings a division into two social classes. Then government develops and introduces a system of exchange. *NMW* no.1, 32, (6 June 1835), 249-53. Such a view shares affinities with the stadial histories popularised by writers in the Scottish Enlightenment which is discussed further in Section 3.3.
[63] *NMW* no.4, 207, 'To the Calumniators of Socialism' - 'A Student in Realities' (13 October 1838), 409.
[64] *NMW* no.1, 26, 'True Philosophy of all Mysterious Dogmas…' - V.CL (25 April 1835), 206-7.
[65] *NMW* no.1, 14, 'The True Philosophy of all Mysterious Dogmas…' - V.CL (31 January 1835), 109-11.

'primitive' stage was also necessary; dogmatic faith offered a source of authority upon which moral instruction could draw, and this enabled the development of human intellectual faculties. Having served this function during the 'primitive' stage, dogmatic faith becomes redundant as more adequate, naturalistic explanations of the physical world supersede supernatural ones. The 'mystic system of instruction' is superseded, and religion comes to be manifest in contemporary science, with faith supplanted by science as an expression of the 'unconscious thirst after knowledge'. The two cannot co-exist because it is a

> physiological truth that, by the same natural laws which ever have prevented man from giving his faith to more than one religion at a time, he shall never be *at once* a scientific man and a religious one; because it is our persuasion that science must be understood as a NEW RELIGION OF FACTS and CONVICTIONS, whose mission it is to supersede all others, to confound all sects and to bind all minds into one for the greater *mundane* happiness of humanity.[66]

'Religion' consists in a desire to know about the world, and passes through stages of development which correspond to the progress of civilisation. The latest, rational, scientific incarnation of religion can 'bind all minds into one', offering the opportunity to overcome the present division between 'sects' and to achieve social consensus.[67] This account of 'science' as the 'NEW RELIGION' includes not only natural science, but also Owenite 'social science', the account of the formation of human character which was the foundation of their philosophy.[68] Owenite socialism is then a part of the new science which offers a source of unity, and which succeeds traditional forms of religion in virtue of its incarnating the human desire to know and to understand. Instead of religion being a matter of the

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[66] *NMW* no.1, 27, 'True Philosophy of all Mysterious Dogmas…' - V.CL (2 May 1835), 213.

[67] There is an ambiguity here as to whether science and religion are mutually exclusive (one can 'never be *at once* a scientific man and a religious one') or whether science is (a new form of) religion ('science must be understood as a NEW RELIGION OF FACTS and CONVICTIONS'). I am inclined to believe, although I lack the evidence to argue for this, that there is a conceptual relapse here, that 'religious' is being used first to describe only the practice of existing religions, before the more abstract usage of 'religion' as such is introduced. One cannot then be both scientific and an adherent of any *existing* religion, while it is also the case that science represents a form of religion *as such*.

[68] This presentation of science as both the replacement for, and an example of, religion demonstrates how the concept of 'religion' is here being used as both a superordinate and a subordinate concept. Religion is being used to describe both a domain of human experience and one of the options within that domain; it is both the overarching category and one of the sub-categories. See Lee, *Recognizing the Non-Religious*, 192–96.

supernatural or of withdrawal from the world, the innate religious feeling motivates a continuous process of learning, and causes science to supersede superstition. As learning advances, so also does religion, an index and expression of human progress.

Such a belief that religious knowledge had increased in the past and would develop in the future was, according to Owen Chadwick, 'assumed by the main stream of English thought in the eighteenth century'.[69] In fact, so fundamental was this belief in religious progress that if offered the paradigm of progress itself, with the expectation of advancing knowledge in politics, science, or the arts itself grounded in the belief that religion was progressing.[70] However, the precise nature of this religious progress was not always agreed. One sense in which religion was understood to be progressing was in virtue of the increasing dissemination of true religion across the world by energetic missionaries. Even where it was agreed that religious progress inhered in advancing knowledge of religion, this was still subject to competing interpretations. One view was that the progress of religion involved God gradually revealing truth to humans in a way which was calibrated to their stage of human development. As David Hartley argued, 'the Bulk of Mankind should have such a Knowledge of God, as suits their intellectual Faculties, and other Circumstances' and therefore 'Improvements in Religion' would correspond to 'Improvements in other Things'.[71] This contrasted with the view of Robertson, Hume, or Lord Kames that religious 'progress' referred to the increasing civilising effects of religion as part of a shift from barbarism to civilisation, rather than as reflecting any greater approximation to divine truth.[72] As a result, they were less inclined to believe that this religious progress was continue into the future. The idea of religious progress was particularly, polemically useful in defending orthodoxy against deism. It offered a defence against the charge of cruelty which was raised by those arguing that it was simply unfair that those who had not been exposed to Revelation were to be denied salvation. Why, it was argued, should those who lived virtuous, meritorious lives prior to Christ's arrival or in a distant land suffer in virtue of this accident of birth? Accounts of religious progress offered a ready rebuttal. Christian Revelation offered an improvement of religion, the unfolding of

[69] Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman*, 77.
[70] Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 368.
[71] Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 2:137–38.
[72] Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 363–73.

divine dispensation through time, but even those who were not exposed to Revelation had access to an undeveloped, nascent form of religion sufficient to confer opportunities for salvation. The belief in religious progress as unfolding Revelation was widely shared in early nineteenth century Britain. What is striking, however, is the way in which Owenites succeeded in resituating the belief in religious progress within an account of the emergence of socialism.

The argument that there is a correspondence between the stage of development of scientific understanding and the state of religious knowledge is also offered by 'A Rational Christian'. She argues that existing 'imperfect' religions are based upon geological and physiological claims which have been found to be inaccurate.[73] Correcting these accounts will provide the foundation for 'the improved religions of the Socialists, who look with fervour to obtain a useful enlightened faith, in lieu of a useless blind one'. Religion is grounded in, and progresses with, the development of science; advances in the natural sciences will redeem people from the 'Original Sin' of ignorance, and so are part of the 'progressive nature of the Christian scheme'.[74] This invocation of 'Original Sin' inverts the Biblical connection between knowledge and divine approbation or human wellbeing; recall, after all, that the original sin which brought about the Fall was in consuming from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.[75] Here, however, in 'A Rational Christian"s account, it is ignorance, rather than defiance of God's will in pursuing knowledge, which is the 'Original Sin'.

Another way of expressing an interaction between 'religion' and other forms of human knowledge is expressed in an explanation of the sense in which Owenites were 'religionists'. The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists (the 'Rational Society') had been formed from the May 1839 merger of the Association of All Classes of All Nations and the National Community Friendly Society, and it represented the primary vehicle for the Owenite movement until it disbanded in 1845. Adopting the identification as 'Rational Religionists' had not been without controversy, and an address

[73] These claims about the relationship between geology, physiology, and the truth of religion reflect how Christian scripture was widely understood to be scientifically true; Biblical accounts of the Creation and Flood provided evidence for geologists, and the scriptural account of the position of humans in the natural order was significant for those promoting new discoveries in anatomy. Rupke, *The Great Chain of History*; Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*.
[74] *NMW* no.7, 80, 'Suggestions Respecting the Management of our Society' – 'A Rational Christian' (2 May 1840), 1279-80.
[75] Genesis 2-3.

by James Hanson to the Huddersfield Branch in April 1840 offers a clarification and explanation of this title.[76] Hanson's address, on behalf of the local committee, seeks to encourage Branch members with news of the good health of the Society, to gird them against persecution, and to 'freshen the minds of the members as to the advantages connected with the society'. Hanson describes the sense in which Owenites were *religionists*:

> It will be well too, at times, to remember that we are rational religionists; not indeed fanatical, nor mystical religionists; but still that we are religionists, and as such, our religion requires that we be religious, not in word only, but in works, that our principles do not sit loosely upon us; remember we are men and women of facts, not of fancies, for our religion is a "knowledge of those unerring and unchanging laws of nature, derived from accurate and extended observation of the great creating power of the universe; and the practices of charity for the feelings, convictions, and conduct of all men, consequent upon such knowledge." Here we see the essence of our religion is truth and charity, the most glorious of all principles. The only basis of religion![77]

Quoting from the Constitution of the UCSRR, Hanson describes how religion is a matter of knowledge of the 'laws of nature', and it is this knowledge which provides the grounding for the ethical dimension of 'charity'. Socialists should act with charity because they have this knowledge of the 'laws of nature', a knowledge which includes not only the laws governing the natural world but also the laws of character formation. It was this account of the plasticity of human character which was understood to justify their attribution of such importance to education and their optimism about creating new, cooperative individuals. Because the Owenite conception of religion refers to knowledge of social and natural science, and to the ethical practices grounded in that knowledge, Owenite social science has a religious quality. However, this religious quality is not in virtue of any messianic role in the

[76] John Hanson worked as a weaver in Huddersfield. He became an Owenite some time before December 1837, rising quickly to a position of prominence in Huddersfield. His lectures were noted frequently in the *New Moral World* throughout 1838, and his involvement with the movement continued for at least six years; he was noted as visiting Harmony Hall in May 1843 and lecturing in Sheffield in June 1844. See *NMW* no.11, 47, 'Progress of Social Reform' (20 May 1843), 376; *NMW* no.13, 6, 'Journal of Social Reform' (3 August 1844), 67.
[77] *NMW* no.7, 82, 'An Address to the Huddersfield Branch of Rational Religionists' – John Hanson (16 May 1840), 1215-6b.

transformation of the world, but rather on account of its representing the advancement of human knowledge of the 'laws of nature'.

One consequence of this perceived relationship between religion and increasing knowledge of the world is that the priesthood stand opposed to true religion. As Robert Buchanan argues in his lecture at the Salford Social Institution in 1839, when 'the truths of science have been too clear to be put down by open hostility, religionists have bribed or intimidated scientific men to square philosophy with the dogmas of bigotry'.[78] According to William Spier in a lecture to the Leeds branch, the priesthood have persecuted men of science, no matter how pure their lives, if they dared to propound truths which contradicted the absurdities and inconsistencies of their favourite dogmas'.[79] Among these 'men of science' were William Harvey (the first physician to recognise the circulation of blood in humans), Edward Jenner, and Galileo Galilei.[80] Each were persecuted by the clergy who, fearful of losing their power, hindered the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge and therefore obstructed the emergence of true religion. Despite this, however, there is cause for optimism. On Frances Morrison's account, the dim, feeble light of superstition is waning and 'a better light, more diffusive, consistant [sic], and exhilarating, the light of real science, the new religious light is coming in, and will finally find an ingress into every human brain'.[81]

These accounts all present religion as being importantly connected to the progress of knowledge, whether as providing the impetus which moves humans to explain and understand the world, or as being itself founded upon the contemporary state of learning and so advancing alongside it. They explain why it is that contemporary faiths become abundant and new forms of religion flower in the emerging new moral world. And they demonstrate how socialism and religion are intimately connected in virtue of the Owenite celebration of education and the way in which Owenism teaches new truths about human nature. On this re-conception, religion is both deeply important and closely tied to socialism.

[78] *Social Pioneer,* 5, 'The Religion of Past and Present Society… by R. Buchanan' (6 April 1839), 36.
[79] *NMW* no.11, 33, 'Leeds' – 'M.' (11 February 1843), 267.
[80] *NMW* no.9, 2, 'The Truth of Prophecy' – 'A Friend to Truth' (9 January 1841), 23.
[81] *Social Pioneer*, 4, 'Extract from Mrs. Morrison's Lecture…' (30 March 1839), 28.

3.3 Religion as Solidarity

This section will describe another dimension of the Owenite conception of 'religion' as a source of solidarity, as a unifying social bond for communities. Recall that the Owenite model of political transformation understood the formation of largely autarkic communities of several thousand people as being the means to bring about the future (and terminal) state of human affairs. On this account, 'religion' would be the source of the other-oriented motivations necessary to sustain such communities, cooperative enterprises in which one's interests were subordinate to those of the collective. It was widely recognised that existing social institutions, the market economy, the family, and mutually antagonistic religious denominations, embodied and promoted self-interest, cultivating individuals who were avaricious and competitive. Such individuals were not fit subjects to participate in the new Owenite communities in which goods would be shared, work determined by the needs of the community, domestic tasks and childrearing collectivised, and the profit motive abolished.[82] Individuals who continued to uphold and be motivated by the ethos of the 'old immoral world' could not and would not sustain socialist institutions in a community. Instead, it was necessary both for there to be new, co-operative social relations and for there to be socialists who were animated by altruistic, community-focused motivations. In the previous section, we saw V.CL declare that a 'NEW RELIGION OF FACTS and CONVICTIONS' would 'bind all minds into one', offering a prospective source of unity and consensus. This section will further explore a conception of religion as harbouring the potential to form a new, socialist ethos. Recognition of the need for such an ethos reflects an awareness of the demandingness of communal life, and of the danger of instability in human social arrangements. It reflects a recognition that rational self-interest could not be sufficient as a source of the attitudes and virtues needed to establish and sustain a community. Yet, instead of the necessary, new, moralised social relations being described as grounded in collective adherence to a new moral code, or to altruism, they are here presented as being grounded in 'religion'.

[82] These are questions which concern both the transition to, and maintenance of, communities. For discussion of the difference in political arrangements between the 'transitional' ('those in which at least some settlement members have characters partly formed under the irrational social arrangements of the old world') and 'non-transitional' ('in which all members have been born and educated within rational circumstances') phases of community, see Leopold, 'Scientific Socialism', 198–99.

An identification of the concept of 'religion' with social solidarity confers considerable status upon it within the socialist imagination. This is so with regards to both historical traditions and philosophical conceptions of socialism. Historically, the rejection of individualism and the emphasis upon the 'social element in human relations' have been identified as defining features of socialism.[83] The idea that individuals 'care about, and, where necessary and possible, care for, one another, and, too, care that they care about one another' has also been essential to philosophical accounts of socialism.[84] For G.A. Cohen, for example, this value of 'community' was one of the two basic grounding values of socialism (alongside equality, or 'socialist equality of opportunity'). The idea that socialists would need to attach non-instrumental weight to the interests of others is an important feature of the socialist tradition. This underlines how a depiction of 'religion' as the source of social solidarity is one which demonstrates the importance of religion. In addition to its value for the wider socialist tradition, this conception of solidarity is closely entangled with Owenite theory and practice. Owenite branches sought to cultivate communal feeling in a way that other contemporary organisations, such as Mechanics' Institutes or Friendly Societies, did not.[85] Activities were both group bonding and political education; when socialists went on a steamship outing, each family would bring food and this would then be 'united in common stock', modelling the collective practices of community.[86] The cultivation of cooperative ethical orientations in prefiguration of life in a community was an important dimension of branch life.

The representation of religion as the source of unity upon which new forms of social relations could be established is found in Samuel Austin's 1835 address at the Sunday evening meeting of the Association of All Classes of All Nations at their Charlotte Street Institute in London. The Sunday evening meeting was an important focal point of AACAN activity, and Austin's address was printed as the leading article in the *New Moral World* (taking up over half of that issue of the eight-page journal). Austin himself had been the secretary of the National Equitable Labour Exchange, and he clearly had a high status in the movement.[87] His death was noted in the *New Moral World*, and subsequently an

[83] Lichtheim, *Marxism*, 21–30; Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 2.
[84] Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, 34–35.
[85] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 95–97.
[86] Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"', 22.
[87] Podmore, *Robert Owen: A Biography*, II:419–20.

effusive report was included following a phrenological appraisal of a cast of his skull by 'Deville'.[88] In his 1835 address, Austin considers the question of whether the Social System is opposed to Christianity, and argues that this is a separate question from the truth or falsehood of Christianity. He notes that there are theological disagreements between Christians, and therefore that at least some Christians endorse an erroneous theology. However, this does not close the question of whether proponents of the 'Social System' should be opposed to Christianity. Austin also notes that, of the different theological variants of Christianity, Trinitarianism is littered with contradictions and obscurity. Unitarians advocate opposing opinions, which gives 'rise to the presumption that neither of the parties has as yet discovered the truth'. Although Unitarianism is preferable, it 'is still miserably defective, particularly in a practical point of view; and in our humble opinion falls far short of that religion, that new bond or tie, with which the Social System can be cordially united'.[89] Austin evaluates these two theological perspectives, inferring from their disagreement that both are imperfect. He then weighs them from the 'practical point of view' as candidates to be the religion of the future, judging that they cannot provide the 'bond or tie' which is to unify the social system. Austin's address to the AACAN involves him weighing the veracity and adequacy of certain theological commitments, and concluding that even the best existing theology is incapable of performing religion's practical function as a source of social unity.[90]

The adoption of such a 'practical point of view' involves evaluating a religion not by its claims to divine truth but by its sociological consequences. In adopting such a perspective, Austin's argument shares affinities with Montesquieu and with writers in the Scottish Enlightenment. In his *The Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu had adopted a 'human way of thinking' about religion which allowed him to recuse himself from questions of truth in order to appraise religions as human institutions.[91] He argued

[88] *NMW* no.3, 119, 'Mr. Samuel Austin' (4 February 1837), 118; *NMW* no.3, 130, 'Character of the Late Mr. Samuel Austin by Deville' (22 April 1837), 205.
[89] *NMW* no.1, 32, (6 June 1835), 249-53. Others disagree with Austin's account; G.A. Fleming muses 'What is Unitarianism, stripped of dogma, but *theoretical* Socialism, while Socialism is *practical* Unitarianism'. *NMW* no.8, 15, 'On Human Perfectibility' (10 October 1840), 238.
[90] A 'bond or tie' with which the 'Social System can be cordially united' might be understood to mean that the Social System is to be joined *to* religion rather than joined *with* religion, but the latter reading seems more plausible. While being 'held with chains in a prison cell' might mean that one sits alongside chains in the same cell, it seems more likely that one is being bound by those chains in the cell.
[91] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* Book 24, 459-78.

that different religions were fitted to different forms of government and contexts because of the behaviours which they encourage: while Protestantism is appropriate to republics, Catholicism is best suited to monarchies, and Islam to despotic regimes. Such a sociological perspective influenced writers of the Scottish Enlightenment, including Adam Smith, Lord Kames, and Adam Ferguson, who similarly approached religions as anthropological phenomena with social and political consequences.[92] In turn, this influenced James Mill, whose concern with the ways in which religion might positively shape social mores motivated him to write his 1835 *The Church and its Reform*.[93] Historians of Owenism have noted the influence of these Scottish Enlightenment writers. J.F.C. Harrison argues that Owenites shared with Adam Ferguson and Dugald Stewart an ambitious interest in human nature and in the totality of social institutions, a common understanding that ethical considerations were central in evaluating social organisation, and a belief that social investigation had to be empirical.[94] Gregory Claeys identified Ferguson and John Millar's argument that the division of labour degraded human personality as an 'important source for...early socialist objections to specialisation'.[95] Claeys also cited the Scottish Enlightenment account of societies as experiencing a stadial development from hunter-gatherer into pastoral and finally into commercial societies, as a 'secularization of the natural law doctrine of the origins of property' which influenced the development of socialism.[96] Further, Claeys argued, Scottish 'common sense' philosophy sustained a tradition of 'sociability', of humans as naturally social and of societies as involving the mutual dependence of happiness, which was inherited by Owenite socialists.[97] However, scholars of socialism have not noted the affinity between the sociological understanding of religion of Smith, Kames, or Ferguson and that of Owenites such as Samuel Austin.

This understanding of religion as promoting solidarity also shares some affinities with a tradition of thought which advocates for the establishment of a 'civil religion'. Thinkers in this tradition have assumed that polities require forms of mutual solidarity, responsibility, and constraint to be exercised

[92] Plassart, 'James Mill, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Problem of Civil Religion', 682–703.
[93] Plassart, 707–11.
[94] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 69.
[95] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 50–51.
[96] Claeys, 12–17.
[97] Claeys, 39–42.

between strangers, and that this can be provided only by a common religion. The adequacy of a religion to perform this 'civil' role is therefore judged by its ability to cultivate the appropriate social mores, nurture the necessary civic culture, and promote the right political virtues. Such a tradition of thought is often associated with Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, although their preoccupations were quite different to those which animated Owenites. For Machiavelli, a civil religion had to nurture martial virtues and promote honour, rendering Christianity, which promoted passivity and acquiescence, unsuitable to perform the role. For Hobbes, the problem was instead the danger that religions provided a competing source of authority and therefore a destabilising threat to the political community.[98] Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concerns were closer to those of the Owenites, although he was dissatisfied with the prospective options. Having established in *The Social Contract* that 'no state was ever founded without being based on religion', he argued that no available religion was fit to fulfil the role.[99] And further, this was not a contingent problem. Instead, it reflected the incompatibility between two competing logics, between the political imperative that citizens favour their compatriots and the religious truth of moral universalism. However, while the participants in this tradition of 'civil religion' claimed to stand aloof from questions of religious truth, Owenites maintained that the promotion of solidarity instead *was* the truth of religion.

Another example of the re-conception of 'religion' as a source of social solidarity occurs in the debate surrounding the financing of a prospective new community (which was to become Queenwood) in 1838. The question of how funds were to be raised to finance such a community revealed not only practical but also philosophical differences, including understandings of class and social division. Some (especially Owen) were hopeful about benevolent financiers gladly providing the resources for communities. Others scorned such an expectation. As Thomas Hunt declares at an 1842 Special Congress of the Rational Society, 'there is one thing, however, and only one thing, which capital can never be brought to do, and that is to commit suicide'.[100] As part of the ongoing debate, Charles

[98] This paragraph leans upon Ronald Beiner's account of the tradition of 'civil religion', and particularly upon Beiner's interpretation of Rousseau's ambiguous engagement with the question. Beiner, *Civil Religion*.
[99] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 162.
[100] *NMW* no.11, 7, 'Proceedings of the Special Congress of the Rational Society' (13 August 1842), 50-1.

Lane[101] wrote to the *New Moral World* in 1838 expressing concern about the proposed acceptance of a £1000 gift from W.D. Saull.[102] Lane feared that accepting such a gift would imply that Owenites believed that money was both a necessary and sufficient condition for the success of community. This was an implication which had to be avoided, Lane argued. Successful communities always required a 'hidden "something" to hold the individuals together', a 'silken thread on which the beads are strung'. Such a 'silken thread', imperceptibly uniting the individuals making up a community, could not be provided by the mere material foundations or the organisation of property; to suggest that it was community of property which would generate social solidarity was to 'make apples their own producers'. That is, it is to neglect that there is a deeper source, a tree which bears the fruit of both social solidarity and the economic organisation of the community. Rather than being the source of social solidarity, community of property was instead the economic expression of that universal fraternity which is the 'ANIMUS of the New Moral World'. As evidence of his argument of the necessity of an underlying social spirit, Lane enlists the example of the Shakers, a puritan communitarian sect which had broken off from the Quakers in Northern England and had been led to migrate to the United States under the leadership of 'Mother' Ann Lee. As noted in Section 2.1.3.3, accounts of the Shakers by John Melish, W.S. Warder, and especially Harriet Martineau, circulated among Owenites in the 1820s and 1830s. Lane's ruminations upon the essential ingredients of a successful community were taking place at a time when weekly reports about prospective sites were being printed, funds raised, and lists of potential participants assembled. This was not distant speculation; the prospect of the establishment of an officially endorsed Owenite community was imminent, with Queenwood established the following year. With this prospect in mind, it is unsurprising that the question of social solidarity was under consideration; the New Harmony and

[101] Charles Lane was a member of the Alcott House community at Ham Common until he emigrated to Concord, Massachusetts in October 1842 (Armytage, *Heavens Below*, 178). He can be seen lecturing on 'The Practicability of Universal Love' at the Pestalozzian Academy, Finsbury in May 1840 or participating in debate when the Lambeth Branch visit Ham Common. *NMW* no.7, 83, 'Advertisements' (23 May 1840), 1241b; *NMW* no.8, 7, 'Progress of Social Reform' (15 August 1840), 108, 14. G.J. Holyoake attributes articles written under the pseudonym 'Pencil 'Em' to 'January Searle, Charles Lane, Charles Bray, and a writer who used the name of Arthur Walbridge'. Holyoake, *The History of Co-Operation*, 1:151–52. This presents a difficulty in clearly attributing the works of 'Pencil 'Em', which also appear in the *New Moral World*.

[102] *NMW* no.4, 176, '"New Moral World,"…' – C. Lane (10 March 1838), 155-6.

Orbiston communities were widely recognised to have failed because members were insufficiently disposed to behave co-operatively. Lane argues that in successful communities,

> the hidden bond of co-operation has usually gone by the name of religion, understood in its right sense, that is a very good term: but, understood as it generally is, it is a total mistake. As soon as any of these communities shall decline to that condition which the word 'religious' ordinarily expresses, their dissolution is near. The very fact of "community" proves conclusively, that at least the tie of these associations is something very different to that religion of which the civilised world is so full. The stoutest opponents of the communal principle are found amongst the paid religious teachers; otherwise there would have been a multitude of communities long ago.

Lane firmly distinguishes between religion in its 'right sense' and religion 'understood as it generally is'. While the former describes the 'hidden bond of co-operation', the latter is 'very different', with proponents who offer significant obstacles to the foundation of communities. The former is a necessary source of solidarity, the latter a symptom of social failure. Such a distinction between the true nature of religion and the corrupted contemporary incarnations sheds light upon the vehement criticism to which existing religious institutions were sometimes subject. It was not merely that existing instances of religion were socially deleterious but that they failed to realise the potential of religion. Instead of being that 'invisible thread' which could unite communities, they were instead socially divisive and an obstacle to socialism. At a time when plans for community were advancing, Lane thought it necessary to clarify how religion should be understood, and to argue for its important role in providing that 'hidden bond of co-operation' which could conjoin the isolated 'beads' into a unified community.

While travelling in the United States, John Finch submitted a series of letters to the *New Moral World* detailing his visits to the communities of the Shakers in Kentucky, Zoarites in Ohio, as well as Brook Farm and Northampton in Massachusetts. Finch's letters were intended to inform the operation of the socialist community at Queenwood, offering insights and suggestions which he had gleaned during

his travels in the United States. After visiting the Rappite community at Economy, Finch notes in his letter, published as the leading article in an 1844 edition of the *New Moral World*:

> I informed Mr. Rapp of what we are doing in England at Harmony. He was much delighted to hear it. He says, "The only binding principle in Communities is *religion*, and that Communities cannot prosper without it." I grant it, and I think that *the religion of the new moral world is the only religion that can bind rational men and women together in community*: and I trust we shall soon be able to prove to the world by our practice that this religion is the best of all religions, and the only one that can truly be called Christian.[103]

Finch and Lane agree that true religion, the religion of the new moral world, is necessary in order to knit together socialist communities. And just as religion alone can nurture the solidarity to bond together disparate individuals, so also, James Elishama Smith argues, in an 1833 lecture, the socialist 'aim is to establish religion' because religion is the union between people.[104]

The discussion of religion as a 'bond or tie' which 'binds' people together, is a discussion about the relationship between successful social organisation, the individual willingness to sustain that organisation, and its material, economic foundation. In contemporary, Rawlsian political theory, these are discussed as questions of 'stability', about the extent to which the actions of individual citizens will sustain and promote the successful operation of the shared institutions under which they live, and the corresponding encouragement of such actions by those institutions.[105] These questions were not sufficiently discussed among Owenites because of excessively optimistic assumptions that individuals in community would be motivated to support their economic and social institutions. Robert Owen was foremost in dismissing such questions, asserting that life in community would be such that the characters of all participants would be transformed, creating the necessary attitudes and motivations to sustain those arrangements. Others approached these questions by advocating for mechanisms of selection or emphasising that there would be a transitional phase during which a new generation was

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[103] *NMW* no. 12, 35, 'Notes of Travel in the United States' – John Finch (24 February 1844), 274.
[104] *Crisis* no.2, 28, 'Institution, Charlotte-Street' (20 July 1833), 217.
[105] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 454–58. This account might also be evocative of Durkheim's vision of religion as offering organic solidarity, although Durkheim's account is not merely of the sociological effects of religion, but an explanation of its source and basic nature. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

reared and educated, and only then would the population of a community display the requisite moral character to sustain community.[106] Another approach was to reject the premise of the question, arguing that no motivations were required beyond rational self-interest; the achievement of community would be in the self-interest of all and so each would recognise this and be motivated to found and promote community.[107] Such a claim was deeply implausible. It seems unlikely that life in community would be experienced as subjectively superior by all participants; some people in the 'old immoral world' are very well-off and enjoy significant opportunities for flourishing which are predicated on their relative power over others. Further, it seems especially unlikely that life would be experienced as subjectively superior *immediately*, as would be necessary for individuals to be appropriately motivated in the short term to promote and sustain community.

It is striking that religion is here identified as a prospective source of unity and solidarity when elsewhere it is described as corrosive and divisive. Elsewhere, it is argued that religions teach adherents that those of rival denominations will suffer eternal damnation for their errant beliefs, or that believers should favour those of their own creed and persecute all others.[108] These two accounts share a significant premise, of the substantial influence of religion in shaping social relations and determining individual behaviour. Yet, they represent contemporary incarnations of religion as a source of disharmony, in contrast to the unifying role of religion in the new moral world.

This section has described an Owenite account of religion as a source of the social solidarity necessary for the successful operation of communities, an account which suggests the importance of religion in the socialist future.

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[106] *NMW*, no.4, 164, Letter from James Robinson (16 December 1837), 63-4; *NMW* no.8, 11, 'Transition Communities' - Pencil 'Em (12 September 1840), 168-9; *NMW* no.10, 51, 'Progress of Social Reform' (18 June 1842), 416.

[107] For example, *NMW*, no.1, 18, 'Burton Rooms' (28 February 1835), 137-40.

[108] For example, *NMW* no.5, 20, 'Pictures of the Saints No. V' – extract from Rev. W.J. Fox (9 March 1839), 319-20; *NMW* no.5, 31, 'Sectarian Persecution of the Socialists' – Joseph Gunson (25 May 1839), 486; *NMW* no.8, 8, 'Rationale of Theological Persecution' – H.L. (22 August 1840), 122.

3.4 Religion and Morality

This final section will describe the Owenite engagement with the question of the relationship between religion and morality. I describe how other Owenites regard religion and morality as being identical, such that religion manifests in ethical behaviour. I noted in Section 2.1.4 that scholars have noted the existence of a relationship between Owenite 'rational religion' and morality. I objected to the *reduction* of rational religion to morality and to the identification of Owenite religion as being *merely* a matter of morality, with the adoption of a religious framework to describe a richer form of morality explained by the absence of alternatives in the context. Here I argue instead that Owenites understood themselves to be coming to a deeper understanding of religious truth in identifying how religion was advanced through moral behaviour.

The argument goes that, at its pure and rational core, religion concerns interpersonal conduct. Acting well towards others lies at the heart of 'religion', or it is the central feature of religion, or it is the primary or sole mechanism by which religious virtue is expressed. The existence of a moral code, and the promotion of adherence to that code, were understood to be the sole feature shared among all instances of religion, and therefore to represent the essential, definitive nature of religion. This is an argument ventured by James Napier Bailey in his 1840 *Preliminary Discourse on the Objects, Pleasures and Advantages*. Napier Bailey was a prolific author and a central figure in Owenite socialism; at various times he was one of the social missionaries tasked with carrying the message of Owenism across Britain and a member of the Central Board of the Rational Society. He was also prominent for his attempts to marry Chartism and socialism in the early 1840s and for his determined advocacy of phreno-magnetism.[109] In his 1840 treatise, Napier Bailey identified the uncorrupted heart of religion as residing in the moral imperatives to treat others as one would wish to be treated, and to act towards others with love and compassion. He noted that in the Bible, religion was used in two different ways. The first was to refer to the practices of ceremonial worship performed by the Jewish people. The second was to refer to the kind of morally laudable act described in James 1:27: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and to keep

[109] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 234–38; Scriven, *Popular Virtue*, 120.

ourselves unspotted from the world'.[110] In such passages, Bailey argued, 'we perceive the word Religion employed to designate our duties to each other, as well as the acknowledgement of a supposed relation subsisting between man and Deity'. And, therefore, socialists were scripturally justified in referring to themselves as manifesting 'pure religion' because they honoured their duties to others. It is in this second, scripturally-endorsed, sense of religion that socialists are 'religious': 'When the Socialists call themselves Religious, they do not mean by that term that they symbolically worship an unknown cause; but simply that they desire to do good, to practice virtue, and to love and seek the truth'. Bailey recognises the existence of controversy in this claim, noting that '[o]ther people may call this morality, and affirm that it is not Religion because it involves not faith in the unknown; but in our opinion it is the highest and purest species of Religion'.[111] While recognising that 'other people' insist that religion is a matter of 'faith in the unknown' or that it refers to symbolical worship of an unknown cause, Bailey instead maintains that morality is the 'highest and purest species of Religion'. 'Mr. Murphy', an Owenite lecturer at Worcester, also holds that religion is a matter of our interpersonal relations. Murphy seeks to demonstrate to his audience in 1838 that socialism is 'the perfection of religion, morals, and politics. Its religion is "Goodwill;" its morals, the promotion of happiness, the annihilation of evil; and its politics, justice and equality'.[112] If it is the case that 'Goodwill' qualifies as an instance of 'religion', then this suggests that religion is conceived to include our actions and attitudes towards others.

On these accounts, of religion being understood to concern our duties to others, and being exemplified in goodwill, religion is understood to be a matter of how one acts towards others. In this sense it loses its distinctness as a realm of activity concerned with the sacred, or transcendent, or extra-temporal. Instead, if to be religious is to be compassionate and loving, then daily instances of compassion and love are manifestations of religiosity. Religious practice is not a matter of ceremonial observance but of ethical probity. It is argued in an editorial in the *New Moral World* that

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[110] The usage of the New Testament to support the argument that true religion consists in acting well, and in performing worldly works, suggests the extent to which, for many Owenites, an abstract conception of 'religion' does remain closely tethered to scripturally-based Christianity. This would not, of course, be particularly surprising.
[111] Bailey, *Preliminary Discourse on the Objects, Pleasures and Advantages*, 29.
[112] *NMW* no.4, 189, 'Progress of Social Reform' (9 June 1838), 260.

> in the Millennium state, to produce happiness will be the only religion of man; and the worship of God will consist in the practice of useful industry; in the acquisition of knowledge; in uniformly speaking the language of truth: and in the expression of the joyous feelings, which a life in accordance with nature and truth is sure to produce.[113]

The worship of God is not expressed through prayer or ceremonial but by labouring, learning, speaking honestly, and expressing one's joy. These temporal activities are perceived to be the practices of religion, while the 'production of happiness' is its theology. Further, they are activities to which Owenites believed themselves to have an intimate connection: they understood themselves to advocate for those who engaged in 'useful industry' and to be the primary supporters of the 'acquisition of knowledge'.

Other arguments are offered to the same conclusion, that religion is concerned with acting well. One argument begins with the propositions that religion is the realm of the highest value and meaning, and that human welfare is of the highest value and meaning. Therefore, to promote the human good is to practise religion. As one anonymous article in the *New Moral World* asks:

> Is it not religion that, with this persuasion, we labour to transmit a better inheritance to those who come after us; that we hasten to bring about that millennium, which some visionaries expect to arise without efforts of their own, seeking to reap where they have not sown? Is it not a *better* religion than that…which teaches separation from the natural emotions of our kind, and excites a *horror* of vices which, by the exercise of our *pity*, might be annihilated?[114]

Here, the idea that the improvement of the world will occur without human participation is dismissed as both imaginary and as unfair (as 'seeking to reap where they have not sown'). However, such a dismissal of supernatural agency alone being the cause of worldly change is not a dismissal of religion. Instead, it is part of an account of a '*better* religion' which does not suppress natural emotions, which responds appropriately to vice, and which promotes the improvement of the world. This account of

[113] *NMW* no.2, 57, 'The Religion of the Millennium' (28 November 1835), 33.
[114] *NMW* no.8, 14, 'Romanism, Judaism, and Quakerism (3 October 1840), 210.

religion is premised on the assumption that religion is concerned with those things of the highest value, reflecting a re-conception of religion which is grounded in a belief in its importance.

In an 1840 lecture at the Manchester Hall of Science, Robert Buchanan offers a conception of religion as both expressed in knowledge of the world (as described in Section 3) and of religion as involving the promotion of moral virtue. Buchanan argues first that the 'expounder of the physical laws of nature is also an interpreter of religion', before continuing to state that 'most of all does true religion manifest itself in the moralist and philanthropist, when these endeavour, by the force of sound culture to nurture in the young mind, truth, honesty, and love'.[115] Buchanan's emphasis upon the use of 'sound culture', altering circumstances to shape human character, in cultivating 'honesty' and 'love' as an expression of 'true religion' confers a religious quality upon the Owenite social science of character formation. 'Omikron' similarly marries the 'pursuit of knowledge' and the 'practice of goodness' as the constituent ingredients of the 'religion of this society', arguing that '[a]s the good of man is the sole object of rational theology, whether speculative or practical, the religion of this society shall consist in the unlimited pursuit of knowledge, and in the unwearied love and practice of goodness'.[116] So central is this 'religion of charity' in the Owenite imagination that it features in the first sentence of the Charter proposed for adoption by branches of the Association of All Class of All Nations:

> By creating one universal sympathetic feeling, that shall ultimately produce one interest, one language, one nation, one government, or one family: influenced solely by the pure and holy religion of charity, to desire, above all things, the well-being and happiness of every one of its members.[117]

This provides a simple response to the allegation that socialism represented a pernicious threat to public morality, for example, identifying Owenite views on the reform of divorce laws as promoting dangerous sexual libertinism and 'free love'.[118] Or the charge that because the Owenite account of

[115] *NMW* no.8, 22, 'True and False Religion' – Robert Buchanan (28 November 1840), 337.
[116] *NMW* no.9, 21, 'Responsibility' – Omikron (22 May 1841), 321.
[117] *NMW* no.1, 30, 'Association of All Classes of All Nations' (23 May 1835), 236.
[118] In fact, Owenite views on this subject were not especially radical, largely seeking to reduce the impact of economic inequality on access to divorce. By 1844, discussions were already taking place in Parliament on similar reforms, culminating in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857. *NMW* no.12, 31, 'National Education' (27 January 1844), 245-6.

character formation was understood to entail the denial of responsibility, that this provided a license for vicious and immoral behaviour. Or the argument that because Owenite socialism undermined religious authority, it threatened the shared norms upon which society was built and corroded the disciplining influence of belief in the Four Last Things (death, judgment, heaven, hell). It was alleged that because Owenism was 'without God; in other words, a form of Atheism' it therefore 'destroys the very essence of morality'.[119] Instead, Owenites could argue that they nurtured the 'pure and holy religion of charity'.

Such an account of religion as a matter of ethical conduct has several implications. First, it identifies religion not as the preserve of socially elite clergymen, but as a phenomenon which is open to all; if religion is a matter of acting well then religious virtue is manifested in quotidian, morally laudable interactions. Second, it suggests that the efficacy of contemporary religions can be judged by examining the degree of moral behaviour in society. And conversely that a religious revival offers the means to achieve a re-moralisation of social relations. Third, if a common morality rests at the rational heart of all religions, then this suggests that denominational boundaries and doctrinal differences will melt away. This all suggests that religion can play a positive role in the achievement and operation of the socialist future.

This final section has noted how Owenites identify religion as a matter of ethical conduct. Just as with the facets of religion described earlier in this chapter, relating to knowledge of the world and communal solidarity, this situates religion as both socially valuable and as closely tied to Owenite socialism.

In Chapter 3, I have identified one prominent Owenite account of the nature of religion, an account in which religion is tied to the means and end of socialism. I described how religion is identified as being related to knowledge of the world, either motivating the advancement of human learning or being rooted in an account of the natural or social world. I then noted how religion is understood as

[119] Beard, *The Religion of Jesus Christ Defended*, 79, 132.

grounding a form of solidarity which is necessary for the success of socialist communities. And how religion is presented as expressed in acting well. In Chapter 4, I will identify some of the sources of this Owenite account, showing both how this account offers a response to particular features of the religious context of early nineteenth-century Britain and how it draws upon theological currents within that context.

Chapter 4: Owenite Socialism in Religious Context

In Chapter 3, I identified one prominent Owenite account of the nature of religion. In Chapter 4, I describe the theological context within which this account should be understood.

The early nineteenth century was a period of pervasive religiosity, with intense debates as to whether orthodox belief should be a requirement for full citizenship, theological considerations influencing public policy, and such extensive scriptural literacy that the British have been described as a 'people of one book'.[1] An understanding of the religious context is therefore necessary for one to comprehend any movement in the early nineteenth century. This is especially so in the case of Owenite socialists, many of whom were engaged in critical reflection on religious questions and who participated in debates with Christian clerics. This chapter will identify some key features of the religious world which they encountered, which shaped their views, which they critiqued, and from which they borrowed. This chapter will perform two functions. The first function is to identify those features of the religious context, of the dominant theology, of the activities of religious institutions, and of denominational division and antipathy, against which Owenites were reacting. The second function is to identify some sources of the Owenite account of religion described in Chapter 3, locating the materials which Owenites were using in constructing their own response to the challenges which they understood themselves to face.

The first function is to examine the nature of the challenges which Owenites encountered in their religious context, which provoked their critical reflection on the nature of religion and demanded their proposed solution. Political thought follows the logic of question and answer, with any argument or theory always a response to a perceived problem or challenge. This chapter seeks to become clearer about the question to which the Owenite rational religion was an answer. This involves investigating the ways in which religion was perceived to be damaging or inadequate and exploring why Owenites thought in the way that they did about the influence of religion upon the world which they encountered. Such a focus upon the nature of the context which they experienced also brings to light

[1] Larsen, *A People of One Book*.

the specificity of this context, the fact that it was a particular religious climate in which Owenite socialism was formed, and to which they responded. Many of the challenges which they encountered and problems which they perceived were not the product of religion or Christianity as such, but instead were reflective of the contingent facts of their own moment. Owenites responded to a culturally pervasive theological orthodoxy, against a moment of incendiary religious division, and against religious institutions which were perceived to marshal scriptural resources against social change. Each of these features provoked socialist critique. They also provided the challenges to which the Owenite account of rational religion was a response, and suggested some desiderata for an adequate solution. These were the problems which Owenites sought to solve, which motivated their account of rational religion, and against which any solution had to be measured and evaluated. The nature of such problems implied the contours of an appropriate solution.

The second function of this chapter is to identify the sources upon which Owenites drew in constructing their response to the challenges they faced. Recognising these sources allows one to recognise both the continuity and novelty of ideas and arguments, to understand when Owenites were following existing conventions of argument, when they were re-stating widely shared beliefs, and when they were defying those conventions and rejecting such beliefs. It also allows one to better understand how these socialists came to think in the way that they did. Importantly, these sources were drawn from within theological debates, from ongoing conversations about the nature of religion. These debates were not concerned with reducing the salience or circumscribing the relevance of religion, but rather with creating a more appropriate and truer form of religion. In borrowing from these sources and participating in these debates, Owenites were working within an existing religious framework, adopting the available vocabulary and assumptions.

It is the primary argument of this chapter that the Owenite enterprise should not be seen as either anti-religious or secularising. I emphasise that the hostility expressed towards Christianity or religion was a response to particular features of a distinctive context. I show that the challenges and problems which they diagnosed in this context, such as the rancorous disagreement, rancorous division or punitive theological tone, found their solution not in curtailing the influence of religion, but in finding a truer account of religion. That is, while they identified a set of challenges which were posed by the

dominant religious institutions and theological ideas, they also argued that these challenges would find their solution with a fuller understanding of the nature of religion. In searching for this solution, they drew upon existing theological debates and many ideas which were firmly within the mainstream of Christian thought. Their rational religion was not an attempt to abolish, delimit, or diminish religion, but instead drew upon existing theological currents in the pursuit of a truer, socialist form of religion. It was not motivated by political or narrowly instrumental concerns, by a desire to use religion for other ends, but by a perceived need to address a particular religious problem. The Owenite rational religion was a solution which can be understood only as a response to the challenges presented by a particular religious context and only as rooted within existing theological debates. This context and these debates have not been adequately recognised in accounts of the emergence of socialism, which focus upon the rise of industrial capitalism, the concentration of labour in new urban settings, or intensifying exploitation. This was the theological context of the birth of socialism, which posed problems to which they responded and provided the resources from which they constructed their solutions.

In Section 4.1, I note three distinctive features of the religious context of early nineteenth-century Britain. I argue that each of these features was frequently an object of Owenite critique, and that Owenites' attempts to formulate an alternative form of religion can be understood as an attempt to overcome the harmful deficiencies they identified. Given that these features were quite particular to early nineteenth-century Britain, this suggests that the Owenite critique of religion should be seen as a response to this distinctive moment and not, for example, a critique of religion as such. This sheds light upon the interpretations of Owenites as anti-religious which were described in Section 2.1.2, and which might be seen as conflating a critique of particular features of their context and a critique of religion as such. These three features of the religious context which I describe in Section 4.1 represent deficiencies which they diagnosed and in response to which they formulated an alternative.

In Section 4.2, I describe the resources which were available in formulating that alternative. In describing these available resources, I demonstrate how the particular socialist conception of religion described in Chapter 3 should be seen as rooted within the theological currents of the early nineteenth century. This further suggests that attempts to translate the Owenite 'rational religion' into secular

terms, as I described in Section 2.1.4, are mistaken. They were not pursuing a project of secularisation, but rather participating in an ongoing dialogue about the nature of religion. In identifying these available resources, I also hope to clarify the novelty of the Owenite account of religion, which rests in the ways in which they synthesised these features into an account of how socialism was to be established and to flourish.

4.1 Challenges and Deficiencies

When Owenites bemoaned the baleful influence of Christianity or religion, they complained of the ubiquity and ferocity of religious division, the hostility of religious institutions to social change, and a punitive and pessimistic theological mood which pervaded society. Strikingly, such features are not typical of Christianity or religion as such, but specific to their own particular context. Even when couched in broader terms, we should recognise Owenite hostility as a response to these contingent features. We should recognise their hostility as a response not to religion as such but to a form of religion which was divisive, conservative, and punitive. Further, these particular features not only prompted Owenite critique, but also motivated their attempt to identify a truer form of religion. Scholars have understood socialists as responding to industrialisation, mechanisation, or the extension of capitalism, but they have not recognised socialists as responding to the quite particular religious moment. In Section 4.1, I will outline three features of the religious context which were particular to early nineteenth-century Britain, which provoked Owenite hostility, and which motivated their attempt to identify a novel socialist religion: i) the extent and intensity of religious division (Section 4.1.1), ii) the hostility of religious institutions to social change (Section 4.1.2), and iii) the punitive and pessimistic theological mood (Section 4.1.3).

4.1.1 Division and Conflict

The first distinctive feature of the religious context of early nineteenth-century Britain which Owenites identified and against which they were reacting was the existence of widespread and vituperative

religious conflict. Religious dissensus is neither novel nor unusual. What was unusual was the ferocity of that dissensus and the degree to which it caused deep social divisions in early nineteenth-century Britain, with fierce conflicts over religious questions and great salience attached to denominational identification. Substantive theological disagreements were keenly contested, with 'the nature of God and the inference to be drawn from His existence (if any)…more hotly debated than at any time since the 16th century'.[2] Suspicions of heterodoxy were pursued by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, with the printers and vendors of allegedly blasphemous publications prosecuted throughout the 1820s and 1830s. The most violent political controversies were provoked by Catholic Emancipation and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and concerned whether eligibility to hold political power should be conditioned on subscription to a particular set of dogmatic tenets (the 'Thirty-nine Articles' which set out the doctrine of the Church of England). Although focused upon legal change, these controversies were not merely parliamentary skirmishes. Instead, they reflected deeper shifts, with increasing salience being attributed to denominational identity and sectarian allegiance coming to rank alongside social class as 'the most important source of social identity' in early nineteenth-century Britain.[3] Sectarian conflict was 'the most characteristic feature of English politics in the early Victorian period', reaching 'bitterness without precedent in English history' when Dissenters in the House of Commons allied with recently emancipated Irish Roman Catholics.[4]

Sectarian identification was reinforced, whether incidentally or intentionally, through the organisation of education and work. Sunday schools were organised along sectarian lines and employers often sought to dampen prospective antagonism among their workers by hiring only from among their own denomination and emphasising their common identity as Anglican or Nonconformist mills.[5] Owenites complained that such divisions were sullying the cause of religion itself, warning that '[s]o destructive of all universality of good feeling have these old world religions been proved to be, that many reflective persons have come to the conclusion that religion itself is bad, and that no universal good can exist as long as it shall be maintained'.[6] They argued that '[l]ooking at the universal dissension which exists

[2] Harris, 'Nature's Chastity'.
[3] McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 36.
[4] Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland*, 30; Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 61.
[5] McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 42.
[6] *NMW* no.10, 32, 'Religion as it has Been, and as it Must Be' (12 February 1842), 258.

among the various sects, it [would be] easy to deduce the corollary that a religion of faith and a life of charity and tolerance are incompatible'.[7] Not only was religious disagreement particularly intense, but it was also more likely to prompt schisms and secessions, bringing about 'the most intensive proliferation of dissenting Protestant bodies' in Britain's history.[8] Such schisms, and the social ructions which they precipitated, were noted in Owenite journals. When a group of evangelical ministers seceded from the established Church of Scotland to form the Free Church of Scotland, part of a dispute over the control of clerical appointments, it was noted that this separation had brought violence and sown division.[9]

The intensity of religious conflict was fuelled by a broader sense of spiritual crisis. There were fears about increasing indifference to religious institutions among the working classes, that the Church had failed to respond adequately to increasing urbanisation, and that freethinkers were insidiously working to undermine the authority of religious organisations. Such fears prompted more bellicose proselytization, as evangelical Christians 'approached the manufacturing poor more loudly and insistently than was fitting to the establishment of squires a century before'.[10] They also prompted the government to embark upon a systematic programme of church building in under-served popular cities with the goal of enhancing social control and bolstering the Church of England against the rise of Dissent and indifference.[11] It was common to cite low levels of church attendance as evidence of widespread indifference.[12] Yet, rates of church attendance were, by historical standards, relatively high, and failure to attend church was also often not indicative of indifference at all, but of fatigue, over-work, pew-rents, inclement weather, and the distance which one might have to travel to a local

[7] *NMW* no.5, 9, 'Religion and Morality' (22 December 1838), 136.
[8] Lockley, 'Mapping Protestant Communalism', 30. There is some disagreement as to whether this was caused by shifts within Christian theology, such as increased biblicism, the waning of the interpretive authority of existing religious institutions, and divergences in how scripture should be read and understood. Or whether instead this proliferation of sects should be explained by wider social currents, such as the weakening of the cohesive institutions of Church and State and the emergence of an increasingly class-based society. See Lineham, 'Christian Minorities'; Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland*, 131–35.
[9] *NMW* no.12, 16, 'The Scotch Secession Riots' (14 October 1843), 126; This event is now commonly known as the 'Great Disruption of 1843', and included among its leaders Thomas Chalmers (see Section 4.1.3). See Withrington, *The Disruption*.
[10] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 5.
[11] Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, 199–200.
[12] This reached new heights with the 1851 census and subsequent 1854 Report by Horace Mann. Mann's Report complained that significant sections of the working classes were 'thoroughly estranged from our religious institutions'. Mann, *Census of Great Britain, 1851*.

church.[13] Even in periods such as the Middle Ages, which appear deeply religious in retrospect, Christians have complained that they lived in a period of dangerous indifference and spiritual crisis, facing social changes which were hostile to Christianity and which demanded a heroic struggle for greater piety.[14] Concerns about rising indifference were a function not of widespread disengagement, but of a preoccupation with spiritual crisis, which lent fervent intensity to religious disagreements.

Owenite accounts of contemporary religion often focused upon disagreement and division as causes of broad societal harm and proof of irrationality. The sheer number of competing groups each claiming to possess the 'true religion' was proof, argued an article in the *New Moral World*, of the disorder and irrationality of the old immoral world.[15] They argued that the ubiquity of disagreement proved that no existing religion was correct, and that the tone of this disagreement proved that those religions were degraded and corrupt. James Elishama Smith complained that these disagreements, which were so often about the 'most trifling and ludicrous conceits and metaphysical subtleties', offered an impediment to social change.[16] Plans for a national system of education had been scotched by squabbles between sects about who should control children's religious education and about how theologically prescriptive this education should be.[17] When the poor sought education and material security, the 'Scribes, Pharisees, Hypocrites' had given them in response only 'the serpent of religious contention'.[18] This religious contention was a barrier to solidarity and the recognition of common interests, preventing cooperation and mutual identification. Denominational identifications were a distraction from shared humanity in much the same way that the family encouraged the prioritisation of one's own relations or class identities erected barriers between employers and employees. At a time when religious divisions were particularly deep and antagonistic, with intense focus upon civil disabilities for Dissenters and Catholics and upon perceiving urban indifferences, this was a distinctive

[13] Floyd, *Church, Chapel and Party*, 5–6; Wolffe, 'Elite and Popular Religion', 360–66.
[14] Morris, 'Secularization and Religious Experience'.
[15] *NMW* no.1, 1, 'Development of the Origin and Effects…' (1 November 1834), 2-6.
[16] Smith, *The Antichrist, or, Christianity Reformed*, 8.
[17] *NMW* no.5, 34, 'Defeat of the Ministerial Plan of Education' (8 June 1839), 537; *NMW* no.4, 193, 'National Superstition and National Education' (7 July 1838), 289.
[18] *NMW* no.3, 127, 'Foolery of Sectarianism Part. II Letter II.' – John Finch (10 June 1837), 360.

challenge for socialists. And it was also an imperative challenge; it was only when religious divisions dissipated that it would be possible for each to act with goodwill to others.[19]

Such a context of fervid and deleterious animosity explains both the Owenite critique and the nature of the solution which Owenites prescribed. The contours of the problem determined the nature of the Owenite solution, which had to encourage civility, include those with diverse commitments, and promote social unity. 'A Missionary' bemoans that mankind 'are now divided, and striving with each other on amount of religious differences', and argues that the necessary response must be 'a truly catholic, or universal religion', which is grounded in the right of each to 'express whatever shall appear to them to be true, and worship God in any form whatever: not interfering with equal right in others; and using only argument and persuasion in making converts to their peculiar creeds'.[20] Because people are not able to alter their own views, the solution must be latitudinarian and inclusive. Facing vitriolic conflict between 'sects and parties' and assumptions that correct belief was a precondition for political inclusion, Owenites recognised that their religious solution must either bring about unity or create the possibility of respectful difference.[21] In order to cultivate the mutual identification and solidarity which were necessary for socialism to succeed, Owenites understood that religious divisions had to be either dissolved or de-emphasised. It was as a response to this problem, that they formulated their solution.

4.1.2 Church Conservatism

The second feature of the religious context against which Owenites were reacting, which prompted their critique and motivated their engagement with religion, was the social and political conservatism of the Church of England. The Church of England had long been understood to be a socially and politically conservative force. Sermons would preach obedience and deference. The Church performed key political functions, including the administration of law, provision of education, collection of information, and the provision of welfare to the poor.[22] Relations of political preferment ensured that

[19] *NMW* no.10, 32, 'Religion as it has Been, and as it Must Be' (12 February 1842), 258.
[20] *NMW* no.9, 7, 'Short Essays on Socialism – No. VII' - 'A Missionary' (13 February 1841), 91.
[21] Given their concern with religious unity, it is somewhat surprising that Owenites have so frequently been described by historians as a 'sect' (see Section 2.1.3.2).
[22] Innes, 'State, Church and Voluntarism in European Welfare'.

the interests of the Anglican clergy were aligned with those of the government. The vast majority of the Anglican clergy, almost all of whom were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, shared the 'common culture and aspirations of the genteel classes'.[23] Poll-books show that in the years 1830-72 the Anglican clergy 'voted more heavily for Tory candidates than did those in any secular occupation'.[24] According to Edmund Burke, the Established Church is

> 'essential to their state; not as a thing heterogeneous and separable; something added for accommodation; what they may either keep or lay aside, according to their temporary ideas of convenience. They consider it as the foundation of their whole constitution, with which, and with every part of which, it holds an indissoluble union. Church and state are ideas inseparable in their minds, and scarcely is the one ever mentioned without mentioning the other'[25]

Yet, this relationship intensified in the early nineteenth century. Facing potential civil unrest at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, a central part of the response of Lord Liverpool's government was to build churches in order to repair the social fabric by promoting piety.[26] The consequent legislation explained that the million pounds of spending was necessary because the new churches would counterbalance 'vicious and corrupting influences dangerous to public security as well as to private morality'.[27] It was increasingly common for sermons to emphasise the relationship between faith and social order, between Anglican practice and respect for property, between piety and acceptance of one's worldly station.[28] Anglicans increasingly believed that the strength of the Church was directly related to the preservation of the existing social order.

This perception that the Established Church was important in ensuring obedience and bolstering the state was shared also among critics, and cemented by the Peterloo Massacre, when a member of the clergy read the Riot Act.[29] The behaviour of the clergy in condoning repression and the death of

[23] Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society*, 3.
[24] McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 44.
[25] Burke, 'Reflections on the Revolution in France', 103.
[26] Chapman, 'Political Transformations', 46.
[27] Soloway, *Prelates and People*, 291.
[28] Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*.
[29] Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford*, 111–12.

seemingly innocent protestors was sufficient as to turn radicals away from the Church and towards anti-clericalism and irreligion. The belief that the Church was working to prevent the democratisation of power was further entrenched by the defeat of the first Reform Bill in the House of Lords in October 1831, in which the bishops who sat in the Lords were perceived to have cast the decisive votes. The subsequent riots represented 'the most serious wave of anticlerical sentiment in modern British history', and the bishops were denounced in the radical press with unflattering comparisons between apostolic simplicity and their episcopal indulgence.[30] The response to the anticlerical agitation of 1831 was only further entrenchment of the links between the Church and political conservatism, as 'the old Tory toast of Church and King became more popular at public and private dinners'.[31] These two, opposed sets of associations between political conservatism and the Established Church and between political radicalism and religious heterodoxy are, in many ways, inter-related and mutually supporting, representing two sides of the same coin. The perception that the Church was tied to the preservation of the existing social order and the obstruction of destabilising change was shared both among those who promoted church-building as the appropriate response to the danger of civil disorder and those who looted the palace of the Bishop of Bristol after the defeat of the Reform Bill in 1831.

Owenite interrogation of religious ideas, arguments, and institutions consistently identifies an alignment between Christian organisations (particularly, although not exclusively, the Established Church), orthodox theology, and the preservation of the social order. This identification is a central claim and an obvious motivation for Owenite religious critique. Religious organisations are flawed insofar as they discourage dissent and seek to placate unrest, promoting a theology which counsels submission, which insists upon the immutability or justice of the social order, which condemns the pursuit of social change as impious or immoral, and which promotes an account of moral probity as inhering in subscription to a particular set of theological tenets. Owenites noted that Christian doctrines were taught which encouraged 'a passive acquiescence in the existing order of things, as ordained by Providence', and which cultivated an understanding of Christian virtue as entailing

[30] Skinner, 'Religion', 101.
[31] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 79.

political loyalism.[32] They complained of preaching from the pulpit which insisted that the poor should simply accept their worldly station, that 'the misery of mankind [should be ascribed] not to our ignorance of the laws of human nature, but to the constitution of the universe, and the innate depravity of our nature'.[33] Articles scold affluent pastors who teach their congregations to accept their social position or mock parsons as mere instruments of the aristocracy.[34] They also charged the clergy with obstructing educational reform, arguing the plans for national education have been corrupted by the anachronistic and inappropriate inclusion of an excess of teaching from the Bible.[35] In order to improve education so that schools were more focused upon the sciences and less upon the Gospel, it would first be necessary to reform church catechisms and forms of worship. Reform of church doctrine was therefore necessary in order to pursue educational reform, to transform education into the 'steam engine of the moral world', the motor of social change.[36] And all of this was just the latest installation in a venerable British history of theological arguments being used to justify oppression, extending back to the Saxons and recently seen in the votes of the Bishops in the House of Lords against the abolition of slavery.[37] The corollary to this use of Christian theology in service of exploitation was the use by the clergy of the legal compulsion and coercion to serve their own goals. Priests could wield 'the terrors of the law, and the swords of the magistrate', using threats of 'dungeons, chains, and death' to 'enforc[e] belief upon timid minds'.[38] Owenite critiques often focused upon the implacable hostility of religious institutions to social change and the use of Christian theology to demonstrate the immorality or impossibility of seeking to alter the social order.

The alliance between the Established Church and state had been a prominent feature in British political life for centuries. However, the identification of the Church as a bulwark against social change, an identification shared by Anglican loyalists and radical critics alike, was particularly intense in the early nineteenth century. Sermons increasingly focused upon political submission amidst fear of a repetition

[32] Morgan, *Address to the Proprietors of the University of London*, 7.
[33] *NMW* no.9, 16, 'Mutual Assurance – No. V' – Amo (17 April 1841), 238.
[34] *NMW* no.5, 4, 'Things As They Are, and As They Might Be' (17 November 1838), 50; *NMW* no.12, 13, 'Notes of a Looker-On' (23 September 1843), 98.
[35] *NMW* no.4, 163, 'Objections and Answers: Responsibility art. 3' (9 December 1837), 50.
[36] *NMW* no.6, 50, 'Causes of Political Difficulties…' - 'A Student in Realities' (5 October 1839), 789.
[37] *NMW* no.8, 2, 'American Christianity' - Amo (11 July 1840), 22.
[38] Buchanan, *The Past, The Present, & The Future*; Smith, *The Antichrist, or, Christianity Reformed*, 45.

of the French Revolution and amidst rising animosity fuelled by bishops scuppering Reform and clerics leading civil repression. This focus is clear in Owenite arguments, which reflect a perception that existing religious organisations and the theology they promote obstruct socialism, and therefore that the success of socialism requires religious reform. In response to this conservative vision of religion, it is necessary to cultivate an understanding of religion as empowering, as committed to improving public wellbeing, and as promotive of rational social change.

4.1.3 Evangelicalism

The third feature of the religious context to which Owenites were responding was the distinctive theological mood of the 'evangelical revival'. The early nineteenth century saw a period of 'evangelical revival' which represented a shift in Christian doctrine and contributed to a change in broader social attitudes. It brought a worldview which was fundamentally antagonistic to that of Owenites, and against which they were reacting.

The distinguishing features of evangelical doctrine were a dogmatic insistence on the factual accuracy of the Bible and an emphasis upon the three 'r's of ruin, redemption, and regeneration.[39] Evangelicals demanded perpetual vigilance against sin and pursued an energetic, crusading proselytization. They focused upon the salvation of the soul rather than worldly improvement, understanding the fallen world as a site of trial and social maladies as the result of innate human sinfulness. The central figure for evangelicals was the sacrificial redeemer of Christ, rather than the morally exemplar Jesus. And they favoured Easter, the occasion of Atonement, rather than Christmas, the occasion of Incarnation.[40] At the mid-nineteenth century, this outlook waned in popularity and it was increasingly common for Anglicans to see God as a father caring for his family rather than as a firm and just governor of the universe, and for Anglicans to believe in the possibility of universal salvation.[41] For

[39] Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism', 236–37.
[40] Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, 765–71.
[41] Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism and British Culture', 110–11.

Boyd Hilton, such a shift is distilled in the figure of Ebenezer Scrooge, who abandons an unforgiving, disciplining Malthusian to adopt a benevolent and charitable outlook.[42]

The precise theology of evangelicalism is, however, less significant than its pervasive cultural influence. It was an outlook which permeated early Victorian society, imposing a zealous, serious discipline of responsibility and regularity even on those who were indifferent to its religious grounding.[43] Evangelicalism became the dominant outlook of the ruling class and exerted a significance influence upon social policy. A relentless focus upon the world as a site of moral trial and the market as a mechanism through which God expressed His approbation and censure discouraged interventionist policy which might disturb this process. Works such as Thomas Chalmers' 1833 Bridgewater Treatise popularised a form of 'evangelical economics' in which claims about free trade, government non-intervention, the specialisation of labour, and prices were interwoven with such arguments about divine purpose.[44] Evangelicals were also attracted to the vision of morally disciplining natural laws found in Malthusianism.[45] Thomas Robert Malthus was an Anglican cleric and economist who had argued that population had a tendency to grow more quickly than food production. In virtue of this natural tendency, a failure to act with abstinence would inevitably result in mass starvation, and supporting the 'undeserving' poor would simply exacerbate social problems. Reluctance to alleviate poverty was also rooted in views of success and profit as spiritually dangerous, and therefore of poverty as an advantageous state which was free from the temptations of wealth. At the same time, poverty was also seen to be the fault of those whom it befell, further undermining interest in alleviating

[42] Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, 765–71.

[43] Young, *Portrait of an Age*. A.V. Dicey identified Evangelicalism and Benthamite liberalism in 1825-70 as 'represent[ing] the development in widely different spheres of the same fundamental principle, namely, the principle of individualism'. He argued that they shared an emphasis on personal responsibility, indifference to the authority of church and state, and personal salvation and self-interest. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation Between Law and Public Opinion*, 399.

[44] Chalmers had himself visited New Lanark during Robert Owen's tenure as manager. Donnachie, 'A Lantern in the Darkness?', 97.

[45] Owenites often imply that Malthusian population theory represented the orthodoxy among the Anglican clergy, yet it is not clear that this is true. Many Anglican theologians had embraced the vision of natural and beneficent harmony described in the *Wealth of Nations* and were dismayed by Malthus's arguments about diminishing returns, the necessity of misery in human affairs, and the exclusion of charity. Many theologians responded either by rejecting the entire enterprise of political economy as tainted by Malthus, or by devising an alternative anti-Malthusian programme of (in A.M.C. Waterman's phrase) 'Christian Political Economy'. While the importance of Malthusianism in shaping the culture and influencing the public policy of early nineteenth-century Britain is undoubted, Owenites are mistaken about the degree to which those ideas were endorsed and promoted by Anglican theologians. See Rashid, 'Richard Whately and Christian Political Economy'; Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion*, 4–6; Waterman, 'The Sudden Separation of Political Economy'.

poverty.[46] This amounted to a bleak and sometimes cruel, unforgiving outlook. The predominant message addressed to the poor, advanced by figures like Hannah More, was that society was an interdependent, hierarchical, unified whole, in which the economic interests of all were aligned. The poor should be contented with their worldly state, and should be discouraged from looking upon their natural, benevolent superiors with suspicion.[47] This evangelical mood inflected much of early nineteenth-century Christianity with an unforgiving and censorious tone.

Evangelicalism and Owenite socialism offered deeply conflicting worldviews, with irreconcilable understandings of the causes of social problems, of the possibilities of social change, and of human nature. Owenites complain of sermons which depict a vicious, judgemental God who favours a narrow elect while condemning all others to eternal suffering, who 'in common life would be deemed a wretch, dead to the best feelings of humanity and justice'.[48] Articles in the *New Moral World* and the *Union* describe preachers who threaten their audience with damnation, with 'the terrors of hell and the faint prospects of heaven', and the judgment of an 'avenging, stern, implacable' God.[49] James Napier Bailey railed against members of the clergy who urge the poor to 'patiently submit' to their fate, who blame social problems upon innate human corruption rather than disordered institutions, and who announce the immutability of the world.[50] And William Hawkes Smith condemned those who seek to encourage among the poor

> a sort of bastard contentment with their lot – declaring it to be the irreversible decree of the Creator of the universe, that the many should toil for the few; and that, to the mass of mankind, this world must ever be a vale of tears, a state of painful probation, in which they must not hope either to enjoy happiness or to develop the faculties, of which they have, in common with their fellows, received the rudiments. This is a timid and impotent conclusion. It militates against all the magnificent generalisations which are discernible in the works and

[46] Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 205–7.
[47] Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, 182–85.
[48] *NMW* no.7, 83, 'The Critic Criticised Article II.' (23 May 1840), 1227b.
[49] *NMW* no.5, 21, 'Religious Fanaticism' (16 March 1839), 334; *The Union*, no.1, 9, 'Sundays Abroad and Sundays at Home' – S.N. (1 December 1842), 386.
[50] Bailey, *Preliminary Discourse on the Objects, Pleasures and Advantages*, 26.

> ways of God, as revealed by the researches of science, or visibly displayed in the mode in which all inferior creatures are fitted to reach and enjoy their proper perfection.[51]

The influence of the evangelical mood is reflected in 'M. Jeffrey"s description of orthodox Christianity as concerned only with 'fall, human depravity, the atonement, damnation on account of belief, eternal punishments, and the trinity', typically evangelical doctrines which stand 'in opposition to reason, justice, and benevolence'.[52] The theology which Owenites encountered, and rejected, emphasised retribution, declared worldly evils to be necessary trials, trafficked in threats of hellfire, and warned that disobedience will be met with perdition. This is a theology which is antithetical to the socialist celebration of possibility, rejection of responsibility, and determination to transform society. It was also a theology which influenced social policy, encouraging 'very pious men' to 'cheerfully acquiesce in the ways of Providence' when they declare that population will be checked by pestilence, war, and poverty.[53] Owenites argued instead that scientific progress and technological innovation would disprove their Malthusian predictions, with mechanisation, innovation, and the more efficient organisation of labour driving increasing production.[54]

In Section 4.1, I have noted three features which were particular to the religious context of early nineteenth-century Britain: the extent and ferocity of religious dissensus, the conservatism of the Church of England, and the theology of the 'evangelical revival'. I identified these as features which Owenites frequently diagnosed as harmful facets of contemporary religions and in response to which they formulated their alternative.

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[51] *NMW* no.5, 23, 'Social Science – Letter III' – W. Hawkes Smith (30 March 1839), 358.
[52] *NMW* no.10, 11 'Discussion Between M. Jeffrey S.M., and the Rev. A. Harvey, Glasgow' – N. (11 September 1841), 83.
[53] Anon., 'Observations upon Political & Social Reform', 2.
[54] In particular, Owenites were evangelists for the use of spade husbandry, a labour-intensive method of farming which was claimed to significantly increase agricultural yields. They were opposed by economists including David Ricardo, who argued that increasing labour the intensiveness of labour would gradually eliminate profit and capital investment, causing stagnation. The 'spade-husbandry debate' raged for around a decade from 1816, although Owenites continued to advocate for the method for decades afterwards, frequently referring to the experimental proof offered by William Falla. See Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 69–73.

4.2 Theological Resources

In Section 4.2, I identify some sources for the Owenite conception of religion. In Chapter 3, I noted the existence of parallels with the argument of Scottish Enlightenment figures that religion can be appraised anthropologically and sociologically. I also noted the existence of a tradition of civil religion, according to which a religion is used to cultivate the virtues and commitments necessary for the stability of a polity. In this Section, the influences identified suggest the extent to which Owenites were participating in an ongoing debate which was oriented towards the discovery of religious truth. I observed in Chapter 3 that the novelty of the Owenite argument was not in their conception of religion as progressive or as open to sociological appraisal. Again, here I show how the Owenite interest in a more rational form of religion or one more entwined with knowledge of the natural world was not original. Instead, the novelty of the Owenite argument rests in the way in which their conception of religion was integrated and entwined with their socialism, conferring a religious quality on the socialist promotion of education, study of social science, or cultivation of solidarity.

The first source which I will identify is the tradition of natural theology (Section 4.2.1). Natural theology was a form of argument which identified the evidence of divine participation in the natural world as demonstrating God's attributes. I note that natural theology was broadly popular in the early nineteenth century, but that while the orthodox uses of natural theology inferred politically conservative conclusions from arguments about divine order, Owenites adopted natural theological arguments in constructing their own socialist account of religion.

Second, I note the existence of popular religion (Section 4.2.2). This is the loose term for an inchoate and unphilosophical form of early nineteenth-century Christianity, which was marked by hostility to obscurity and dogma, suspicion of a clergy perceived to be didactic and hectoring, and by an ethical conception of religious virtue. This was a form of anti-theological religion which was common among the working classes and was not the product of lesser piety or weaker commitment, but of resistance to the 'respectable' expectations of organised religion.

Third, I note how the Owenite account of religion shares much with deism (Section 4.2.3). Deists offered an anti-clerical form of religion, suspicious of the corrupt interpolations added by priests to

an original, simple religion, and according to which religious texts were not venerated as unimpeachable truth but human documents which could be read and criticised and which might have historical sources.

Finally, I discuss the affinities between the Owenite conception of religion and that of Rational Dissenters (Section 4.2.4). Other scholars have noted how Rational Dissenters contributed assumptions about the nature of truth or about the processes of social change to Owenite ideology. And how Rational Dissenting communities provided a social infrastructure and philosophical inspiration for other contemporary radicals. However, it has not been noted that the search of Rational Dissenters for a form of religious truth which was accessible through the application of reason shares significant affinities with the Owenite project of religious reform.

The boundaries between these categories are somewhat artificial. Popular religion and deism are interconnected, with a common emphasis upon a simple, ethical religion and repulsion at the apparent cruelty of orthodox theology. The arguments of natural theology were widely shared, including among Rational Dissenters and deists. And while there is a firmer boundary between Rational Dissenters and deists in virtue of their self-identification, there was a continuum of views in which the more extreme forms of Rational Dissent shared much with moderate deism, particularly with regards to the perceived power of reason to access religious truth. Nonetheless, despite the permeable borders and commonalities between these categories, they do still represent distinct sources of influence upon the Owenite conception of religion.

These sources promote a vision of religious truth as being found through the application of reason, or religious virtue as primarily ethical, or religious knowledge as gained through examination of the natural world. And they do so without implying that religion is therefore of diminished value of importance. They suggest that the pursuit of a more rational religion is not the same as the secularisation of religion (as discussed in Section 2.1.4). They reflect how an anti-clerical form of religion is not thereby diluted. These sources reflect the roots of the Owenite account of religion, roots which are somewhat surprising given that Owenites were so frequently excoriated in their own time

as godless infidels.[55] These sources reflect how, in forming their conception of religion, Owenites inherited existing patterns of thought and creatively responded to existing desires, such as 'yearning [among artisan radicals] for a form of religion that was independent, socially relevant and visionary'.[56]

Identifying the relevant influences upon the Owenites as they debate the essential nature of 'religion' is necessarily imprecise for two reason. The first is a matter of evidence; there simply is not the evidence to know who read what and when, or who discussed a text and with whom. Without records of correspondence or diaries, it becomes impossible to know whether this or that Owenite read, and was inspired by, Hume, and one is therefore unable to precisely reconstruct the relevant intellectual world.[57] Second, many Owenites were autodidacts, who lacked the training to engage with sophisticated scholarly works, so the nature of the influences upon them are more indirect. The second sense concerns the nature of the influences upon many Owenites. Many Owenites were autodidacts, who lacked the time and training to engage with sophisticated scholarly works, and who lacked the resources to accumulate many books. Much 'Owenite writing was the thinking aloud of home-spun philosophers' who absorbed, scrutinised, manipulated, and recombined the dominant modes of thought of their time.[58] In order to examine the relevant intellectual context, one should look not to the precise details of scholarly debates taking place among theologians or philosophers in universities, but rather to the predominant ways of seeing and understanding the world, the climate of thought and opinion, in early nineteenth-century Britain. As a result, there are only occasional references to the most eminent contemporary philosophers of religion: Immanuel Kant,[59] David Hume,[60] Ludwig

[55] The charge of infidelity was often prompted by a perception not of unbelief but rather of danger. As Edward Royle notes, the accusation of 'infidelity' was provoked not by divergence from Anglican doctrine, but by 'unorthodox beliefs of any kind which were held by or shared with members of the lower orders'. Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 24.
[56] McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 198–200.
[57] As I note in Section 4.2.4, the influences upon Robert Owen himself are more easily identified by studying the diaries of William Godwin or examining the records of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society during the period of Owen's attendance in the 1790s. See, for example, Fraser, 'Robert Owen in Manchester'; Rosen, 'Progress and Democracy'.
[58] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 220.
[59] *NMW* no.7, 82, 'The Quarterly Review of Socialism' (16 May 1840) 1203-7b; *NMW* no.12, 21, 'Progress of Social Reform on the Continent…' – F. Engels (18 November 1843), 161.
[60] *NMW* no.1, 43, 'Materials for Thinking' (22 August 1835), 344.

Feuerbach,[61] David Strauss,[62] or even British Deist William Wollaston,[63] or William Paley.[64] References are more common to Thomas Paine,[65] Voltaire[66] or Baron d'Holbach,[67] but it is important to recall that most working-class homes would have had few books in the early nineteenth century.[68] It was more likely for philosophical influences to be found in popular newspapers, journals, or almanacs, which might include extracts and original articles, or even in romantic poetry. Owenite journals included long extracts from Shelley and Byron, alongside original compositions by Owenite poets such as Robert Buchanan. This poetry was clearly accorded high status as a source of both philosophical insight and entertainment, and the pantheistic imagery of Shelley's *Queen Mab* or the hostility to ecclesiastical authority of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* would doubtless have shaped the Owenite imagination of religion.[69]

The remainder of this section will describe four sources for the Owenite conception of religion: natural theology (Section 4.2.1), deism (Section 4.2.2), popular religion (Section 4.2.3), and Rational Dissent (Section 4.2.4).

4.2.1 Natural Theology

The first resource which was available to Owenites as they formulated a socialist account of religion was the tradition of natural theology. The tradition of natural theology emphasised the

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[61] *NMW* no.13, 37, 'An Old Friend of Yours in Germany' (8 March 1845), 295. This pseudonymous author was Friedrich Engels.
[62] *NMW* no.7, 80, 'Suggestions Respecting the Management of our Society' – 'A Rational Christian' (2 May 1840), 1279-80; *NMW* no.9, 17, 'Anti-Supernaturalism' (24 April 1841), 258-9. Strauss's *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* had been published in German in 1835 and translated into English in 1842. Dodd, 'Strauss's English Propagandists and the Politics of Unitarianism, 1841-1845'.
[63] *NMW* no.6, 61, 'Origines Religionum: Article II' – Zaphnath-Paaneah (21 December 1839), 965-7; *NMW* no.8, 24 'Chemistry No. IV: On the Chemical Agency of Electricity' – Eigel Skallegrimi (12 December 1840), 370; *NMW* no. 9, 15 'Chemical Equivalents, or Definite Proportions (10 April 1841), 229-30.
[64] *NMW* no.1, 41, 'Two Words on Lord Brougham's…' (8 August 1835), 326; *NMW* no.13, 2, 'Godwin, Paley, and Malthus' – extract from W.J. Fox (6 July 1844), 15; *NMW* no.13, 9, 'Journal of Social Reform – Oldham' (24 August 1844), 71.
[65] For example, *NMW* no.7, 85, 'Prosecutions for Blasphemy' (6 June 1840), 1284-5b.
[66] For example, *NMW* no.3, 143, 'Worship' – extract from Voltaire (22 July 1837), 317-8.
[67] For example, *NMW* no.2, 62, 'Is Man a Free Agent?' – W. Peel (2 January 1836), 78.
[68] In his study of (predominantly male) working-class autobiography, David Vincent found that most homes would have had only a handful of books. Secular books were comparatively rare; John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* featured prominently alongside the Bible and Book of Common Prayer. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 111.
[69] Morgan, 'The Transmission and Reception of P. B. Shelley'; Olsen, 'Byron and God'.

complementarity between knowledge of the natural world and knowledge of God. It was argued that a richer understanding of the temporal world would further elucidate its underlying harmony, reflecting the world's divine origins. The most famous exponent of natural theology was William Paley, whose *Natural Theology* was first published in 1802 and came to be one of the nineteenth century's most popular religious texts.[70] Paley's work offered a torrent of examples of apparent design in nature to show how God, the 'great architect, the celestial designer, the supreme contriver' acted through regular laws to guide the natural world.[71] These regular laws were expressive of the divine attributes of omniscience and omnipotence.[72] The tradition of natural theology would then reach its zenith with the publication of the Bridgewater Treatises in the early 1830s. Funded by a bequest from the Earl of Bridgewater, the eight Bridgewater Treatises were intended to illustrate the divine presence in the natural world and covered a range of topics including economics, chemistry, and anatomy. Composed by the most eminent scientists, they were regarded as important reference works which distilled the most advanced science of the time, and they were often found in lending libraries and featured in popular miscellanies. As well as detailing scientific advances, they also demonstrated how the social and political order existed within a divinely-ordered framework. The argument that the study of the natural and social world revealed God's wisdom was used to license conservative political conclusions, with emphasis upon the existence of an ultimate harmony which required acceptance of one's place in a precisely ordered whole. Natural theology could also be used to prove how purportedly pernicious features of human experience were really necessary to a greater, divinely-endorsed purpose. William Kirby's Treatise on the behaviour of animals was particularly favoured by organisations such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge because it emphasised how each species was naturally suited to its 'station'.[73] In his Treatise, geologist William Buckland noted that coal, iron ore, and limestone, the three components needed for iron smelting, were to be found next conveniently next to each other in the earth's crust. This illustrated, it was argued, the divine endorsement and encouragement of Britain's industrial development.[74]

[70] Fyfe, 'Publishing and the Classics'; Young, 'The Natural World', 380–82.
[71] Nicholls, *Deity and Domination*, 55–56.
[72] Eddy, 'Nineteenth-Century Natural Theology', 101–2.
[73] Topham, 'Science and Popular Education in the 1830s', 422–23.
[74] Rupke, *The Great Chain of History*, 257–58.

Natural theology offered a popular form of argument for those seeking to defend a social and political order which they believed to be in danger.[75] It was also attractive to those who were seeking to cleanse scientific endeavours of the odour of radicalism of Joseph Priestley and Erasmus Darwin, and to show that scientific research could be politically unthreatening. Further, because natural theology did not entail or presuppose any controversial theological claims, it could also serve as a point of ecumenical agreement between contending denominations as they confronted deistic materialism. Where controversy did arise, it was often because the ambitions of natural theologians were exaggerated, with Evangelicals complaining that natural theology implied that Revelation was unnecessary, encouraged pride in the power of reason, or distracted from sin and the need for redemption.[76] Natural theologians responded, in turn, that their arguments neither sought to offer formal proofs nor negated the necessity of Revelation. Despite these disagreements, natural theology was widely attractive. It helped to establish scientific endeavours as potentially unthreatening, and it appealed to those who sought to demonstrate that humans should accept their station in an ordered and harmonious world.

Given that natural-theological arguments were so frequently used to counsel obedience and quiescence, it might be surprising that they were adopted so readily by socialists. John Finch could argue that the best way to spread understanding of God's attributes was through education about the natural and social world, and therefore that ministers should

> open your churches and chapels every evening in the week, and instruct the whole people in all the Useful Sciences; Astronomy, Geography, Botany, Natural History, Geology, Mineralogy, Chemistry, Political, Social, and Domestic Economy, &c. Point out to the people the wisdom and goodness of God as exhibited in all his works; and, by this means, the time will soon come when the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas.[77]

[75] Turner, 'The Secularization of the Social Vision of British Natural Theology', 105.
[76] Brooke and Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature*, 147–54; Corsi, *Science and Religion*, 178–79; Topham, 'Science and Popular Education in the 1830s'.
[77] *NMW* no.3, 126, 'The Foolery of Sectarianism Letter III' – John Finch (25 March 1837), 173.

Similarly, it could be argued that Copernicus's discovery of a heliocentric solar system had served 'to reveal a more exalted knowledge concerning the power and wisdom of God' or that the 'Book of Nature…tells of God'.[78] The same connection between scientific understanding and religious knowledge is identified when Robert Buchanan argues that the 'expounder of the physical laws of nature is also an interpreter of religion'.[79] They happily cited William Buckland's Bridgewater Treatise on the evidence of design in fossils as demonstrating the concurrence between revelation and geology, between the truths of science and of religion.[80] However, they also fulminated against those 'religionists [who] have bribed or intimidated scientific men to square philosophy with the dogmas of bigotry', with the Bridgewater Treatises an attempt to 'patch up the rents which philosophy has discovered in theology; and to make the antagonistic principles put on the semblance of agreement'.[81] While concurring with the argument that the existence of order in nature testified to the attributes of a designing God, they also rejected the moral conclusions which were often drawn from such an argument. As 'A Socialist' declared, 'the law of Nature – the law of God, is my bible, and in it I read a lesson which no Christian can derive from his pretended revelation'. This lesson, 'A Socialist' maintained, was that instead of simply awaiting an afterlife or accepting one's station, each should act now to improve the world.[82] While drawing upon the tradition of natural theology, they contested the common conclusions which were drawn from claims about the presence of divine order in nature.

4.2.2 Deism

The second theological resource upon which Owenites could draw was deism. Deism is a view which affirms the existence of God, but without affirming the truth of any particular theology or religion. English deism began to emerge at the time of the 1624 publication of Herbert of Cherbury's *De Veritate*, and flourished until the mid-eighteenth century, including works such as John Toland's

[78] *NMW* no.4, 208, 'Copernicus versus the Ptolemaic System' (20 October 1838), 422; Bray, *The Education of the Feelings*, 182.
[79] *NMW* no.8, 22, 'True and False Religion' – Robert Buchanan (28 November 1840), 337.
[80] *NMW* no.3, 133, 'Physical Science (Abstracted from the "Edinburgh Review," just published)' (13 May 1837), 230.
[81] *Social Pioneer* no.5, 'The Religion of Past and Present Society…' (6 April 1839), 36.
[82] NMW no.2, 66, 'Immortality of the Soul' – 'A Socialist' (30 January 1836), 107.

Christianity not Mysterious (1696), and Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730). Lord Herbert of Cherbury identified humans as having a providentially-provided, instinctive capacity to immediately grasp the divine, and noted five central, simple propositions as the 'fundamentals' of religion. Herbert was repelled by the idea that majority of humans would face eternal damnation, and argued that these 'fundamentals', which offered the common essence of all religion and were available to all, were substantial enough to ensure salvation.[83] His emphasis upon a simple religion which could be understood through introspection was hostile to authority and tradition, and to another deist preoccupation: priestly imposture. Herbert and other deists argued while all share an innate, natural religion, power-seeking priests had added subsequent layers of obfuscation and corruption, including polytheism and sacrifice.[84] They undertook an historical and comparative academic study of religions in order to find the central core of religion, which they believed to be both original and natural.[85] On this account, contemporary religions were human creations which could be studied historically. Although some radical deists maintained that reason and nature were sufficient sources of religion, this was a marginal position, with deists such as John Toland accepting the validity and necessity of revealed religion. Toland argued that humans must have enjoyed rational access to the laws of morality prior to Revelation because it would be unjust for some to be denied the prospect of salvation merely because they had been born prior to Revelation. However, some aspects of the moral truth were too deep to be apprehensible by natural reason. Instead, Christ was also essential, having been sent to teach those laws of morality which natural reason had proven insufficient to convey. During this period, deism was largely confined to the upper strata of society and tended to be an intellectual pursuit.[86] Although they challenged the religious consensus, they were deeply pious and their heterodoxy should not be exaggerated. Most believed in divine reward and punishment for virtue and vice, in the efficacy of personal prayer, and in a God who actively intervened in the world.[87] This

[83] Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, 64–73.
[84] Harrison, 75–83. David Hume's 1758 *The Natural History of Religion* was to argue exactly the contrary, identifying polytheism as the natural religion and competition between theologians as causing this religion to fracture into existing monotheisms.
[85] Popkin and Goldie, 'Scepticism, Priestcraft, and Toleration', 86.
[86] Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*.
[87] Schweiker, 'Morality and Natural Theology'; Waligore, 'The Piety of the English Deists', 184–97; 184.

incarnation of deism was primarily an intellectual position, pursued by a social elite and unconnected to any broader project of political radicalism or social critique.

By the late eighteenth century, however, such arguments about contemporary religions as human creations were coming to take on different connotations. A perception that French irreligion had contributed to social disorder and brought about the French Revolution saw deism come to be seen less as an intellectual enterprise than as a mortal danger.[88] A popular conspiracy maintained that the French *philosophes* had been seeking to dissolve the social glue of religion, weakening the social fabric in order to pursue a conspiracy to overthrow their own government.[89] This specific conspiracy formalised a growing belief that irreligion was politically motivated. Voltaire was accused of denying the soul's existence and God's immortality only in order to license murder and theft.[90] When a bookseller was prosecuted in 1797 for selling Paine's *Age of Reason*, the judge argued that Paine's text was an attempt to 'destroy all civil obligations'.[91] Deism was no longer an academic pursuit. Instead, deism was seditious and destabilising, disreputable and foreign, motivated by the goal of corroding social fetters to encourage immorality and popular disorder. This was a shift in both the reality and the perception of deism. On one hand, fear that French irreligion had encouraged social unrest brought increasing emphasis upon piety as necessary to prevent revolution and unbelief as a threat to social order. On the other, deism had become increasingly popular beyond its previous narrow intellectual elite, and was increasingly combined with other campaigns for social and political change into an outlook which was more broadly hostile to the Church and state. These connections, between antipathy to the dominant form of Christianity and the pursuit of social and political reform, were forged particularly by Thomas Paine and Richard Carlile. As discussed in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.1.2),

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[88] 'Atheism' had long been associated with danger and immorality. It was also seen as fundamentally irrational, requiring the implausible belief, against all clear evidence, that the world was not rule-governed and orderly but disordered and chaotic. It was also seen to be arrogant, because it involved not modest doubt but an active assertion of God's non-existence, and as destabilising, because it prevented people being reconciled to their government. In virtue of its forceful pejorative quality, the term 'atheism' was often overextended to damn any kind of heterodoxy which one perceived to be dangerous and disorderly. There is also reason to be wary about its usage by later, secularly-minded historians, who inappropriately identify a tendency to 'atheism' in heterodoxy or scepticism. Alexander, 'Defining and Redefining Atheism'; Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 1–2; Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, 55–59; Hudson, 'Atheism and Deism Demythologized'; Hudson, Lucci, and Wigelsworth, 'Introduction: Atheism and Deism Revived'.
[89] Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, 151–54.
[90] Hole, 151–54.
[91] Quoted in Nash, 'The (Long) Nineteenth Century', 214.

both Paine and Carlile contributed to the emergence of 'freethought', which married deism with a celebration of reason, animosity towards 'kingcraft', support for freedom of expression, hostility to the 'taxes on knowledge'.[92] Where previously deism and rationalism were the preserve of a social elite, from the early nineteenth century they increasingly came to be embedded within a worldview hostile to authority, a worldview associated with political campaigns and promoted by the lower classes.

The influence of deist arguments on Owenism is clear. Owenite arguments were often grounded in a conviction of God's fairness and goodness, with seemingly vicious or unforgiving doctrine rejected as a result. Such a conviction motivates James Napier Bailey's question:

> What shall the Being who is infinite in majesty, grandeur, goodness, justice and love, consign me to irremediable torture, because I cannot subscribe to creeds which reason scouts, and common sense rejects. No! I would not derogate from his dignity, by supposing for a moment, that my sufferings could add to his happiness, or that he would thus afflict his weak and imperfect creatures.[93]

Another similarity was in the Owenite adoption of the strategy of critical reading of the Bible, searching for internal inconsistencies, examples of divergences between contemporary practice and scripture, and for instances of improbable or bizarre behaviour. 'A Weak Believer' raises a series of questions about the plausibility of St John's account of Jesus healing a paralysed man at Bethesda. How, 'A Weak Believer' asks, do we know that the man who was supposedly healed had not simply recovered naturally? Why was he the only person healed when others were similarly needy? And does the disagreement between the John's Gospel and those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke suggest that the latter were exaggerating when they claimed that Jesus frequently cured people?[94] The same author raises similar questions about inconsistencies in the story of Christ and the money-lenders, and subsequently categorises the books of the Bible into those which are 'undoubted and unquestionable', those which are 'generally approved but questioned by some', and those which are the 'impious

[92] Nash, 214–16.
[93] *NMW* no.6, 39, 'Essays on Human Nature: Essay V' - J. N. Bailey (27 July 1839), 636.
[94] *NMW* no.4, 163, 'The Probable Results of the Attainment…' (9 December 1837), 53.

forgeries of Heretics'.[95] Compendiums were produced by Owenites like Robert Cooper which listed scriptural passages which were either mutually inconsistent or which appeared to contradict the Church's teaching.[96] Other Owenites, such as James Napier Bailey, described bizarre and implausible stories about saints, such as the tale of crows bringing bread to Paul the Egyptian or of pious lions helping to dig his grave. [97]

Owenites also treated religious doctrine not as revealed truth, but as human claims which had historical sources and could be traced through time. Christianity, just as other religions, was not regarded as divinely instituted but instead as a human enterprise. This prompted genealogical investigation of the sources of controversial components of Christian doctrine. It was argued that the divinity of Christ was only subsequently added to Christianity by 'some Greek philosophers of the peripatetic school, who, in embracing Christianity endowed it with part of the obscure metaphysics, under which Plato had thought proper to conceal some truths too dangerous to be published in his time'.[98] The apparent sources of other doctrinal claims could be found in other religions. Zoroaster had taught the Fall of Man, Pythagoras had taught the expiation of sins, and St Paul had adopted the doctrines of Original Sin and Predestination from a source which was not 'his divine master'.[99] The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience taken by monks can be found in Buddhism.[100] James Napier Bailey finds the doctrine of immortality in the beliefs of the Egyptians and Scythians, while the doctrine of metempsychosis (the transmigration of souls) had been taught by Hindus and by the Jewish 'Cabbala'.[101] Identifying the sources of Christian doctrine presented religions as human institutions, and cast doubt on the divine origins of the Christian church.

Owenites also borrowed from deism an account of an original and moral religion which can come to be corrupted and complicated by the priesthood. The first religion, James Elishama Smith argued, was

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[95] *NMW* no.4, 161, 'To the Clergy of Every Denomination of Christians – Letter II', (25 November 1837), 39.
[96] For example, Cooper, *Biblical Extracts; Or, The Holy Scriptures Analyzed.* Robert Cooper was one of the teachers at the Salford Co-operative School who had been a prominent Owenite lecturer since the age of 16 and who remained close to Owen until Owen's death in 1858. His *Biblical Extracts* was a compendium of scriptural 442 quotations.
[97] Bailey, *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*, 128–47.
[98] *NMW* no.5, 35, 'Rapid Sketch of the Origin…' – Verax (22 June 1839), 547.
[99] *NMW*, no.7, 76, 'On the Existence of Moral Evil…- Essay XXVI' – X. (4 April 1840), 1213; *NMW*, no.6, 54, 'On the Existence of Moral Evil…- Essay XV' – X. (2 November 1839), 851.
[100] Bailey, *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*, 128–47.
[101] *NMW*, no.6, 46, 'Essays on Human Nature: Essay VI' - J.N. Bailey (7 September 1839), 730.

a 'simple unarticled religion of nature' which was 'perfect at first,…incapable of addition or improvement, [and therefore] any attempt to mend or add only deforms its native simplicity'.[102] It includes a common core of morality which is then shared among all religions: the 'self-same morality which is found in the New Testament is also embodied in the sacred books of the Chinese, the Hindoos, the Mahometans'.[103] Yet, this ancient, ethical, and simple religion was then adulterated by a corrupt, power-seeking priesthood who added unnecessary creeds and ceremonies. Priests simply taught whatever served their own narrow goals, seeking to encourage ignorance, and it was the nature of a socialist to oppose them:

> A SOCIALIST, is one who feels convinced that no priesthood ever taught anything to the people but that which they deemed proper the people should believe for the best interest of their churches, keeping the people in the most profound ignorance of all the positive Sciences that were essential for the people to know, to promote their own interest and welfare.[104]

As a 'Rational Religionist' argues, priests understood that they would become redundant when superstition had been overcome, when their churches would be empty and congregations would ignore their 'religion of words, without sense, of faith without deeds'.[105]

4.2.3 Popular Religion

The third resource of the early nineteenth century theological context upon which Owenites could draw was popular religion. Accounts of the religious context often focus upon organised religion. Such a focus is understandable; organised religions are a more visible feature of the historical record, leaving behind evidence of codified doctrine and of participation in public discourse. Yet, this focus neglects popular religion, a flexible form of religion in which beliefs might be unformalised or inconsistent, identity loose or nominal, and practice a melange of doctrinal orthodoxy and traditional customs. At

[102] Smith, *The Antichrist, or, Christianity Reformed*, 108.
[103] *NMW* no.6, 53, 'On the Existence of Moral Evil… - Essay XIV' – X. (26 October 1839), 838.
[104] *NMW*, no.7, 80, 'Suggestions Respecting the Management of our Society - 'A Rational Christian' (2 May 1840), 1280.
[105] *NMW* no.7, 77, 'The True Christianity' - 'Rational Religionist', (11 April 1840), 1231.

times, this was also a form of religion which was hostile to religious institutions, an opposition motivated not by indifference or unbelief but by antipathy to the self-importance of the priest, to the condescension of a middle-class congregation, or to sermons demanding obedience to one's betters. Many of the working classes found churches or chapels to be alien and unwelcoming; they encountered a form of Christianity which was staid, sober, temperate, and 'respectable'.[106] The encountered codes of 'religious' behaviour which embodied the mores of the middle classes; to be 'religious' was to be teetotal, thrifty, churchgoing, earnestly pious and respectable.[107] Instead, members of the working classes often preferred a form of popular religion was 'primarily about doing the best one could and doing no-one else any harm', a theology which was 'strongly practical, and was concerned especially with mutual aid, and with maintaining standards of "decent" behaviour'.[108] This was an 'ethical and community-based definition of Christian living'.[109] There was limited interest in doctrinal questions, and instead of justification by faith, most English labourers believed that 'a generally well-intentioned life, lived free of the worst debaucheries, would be rewarded'.[110]

There are some parallels between deism and this form of popular religion. They both emphasise a benevolent God, understand religion as primarily ethical, reject doctrines which are repugnant, abstract, or obscure, stress practicality, and express a suspicion of priests. However, popular religion is more self-consciously Christian, focusing upon Christ as a moral exemplar and advertising an untheoretical, undogmatic Christianity. There is less concern with critical readings of scripture, with historical study of religion, or with the application of standards of rational evaluation to religion. The influence or affinity with such an account of popular religion is clear. Socialists understand themselves as speaking to those who 'did not understand the complex doctrine of saving grace; they felt no

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[106] Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland*, 121–24; Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban Industrial Society*, 277–78.
[107] Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 33. Although popular religion did include a role for symbols and rites, weekly church attendance was not understood as a religious duty. This gives even greater reason to reject assumptions about low rates of church attendance as reflecting religious indifference (see Section 4.1.2). Such assumptions measure the strength of religion in the currency of church attendance and quiet, respectable piety, accepting one particular vision, that of the Victorian middle classes, of what it means to be 'religious'.
[108] Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland*, 138; McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 11; Robson, 'The Failures of Success'.
[109] Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland*, 138.
[110] Hempton, 138. This reflects a more 'democratic' understanding of religion, which shares much with other forms of 'populist' religion, with the assertion of popular control over the meaning and content of beliefs and practices, and the rejection of the idea of religion as governed by an elite. There are parallels here with Edward Berenson's account of French 'populist religion'. Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics*.

concern in it… a Socialist comes and talks to them on matters they can understand; he shews them a practical religion'.[111] Similarly, socialists such as 'A Looker On' emphasise Christ's standing as an ethical paragon and dismiss theology which is needlessly obscure and abstract, announcing that

> we desire they should preach practical Christianity; that they should take the great truths which fell from the lips of Jesus as their doctrine, and his example as their guide; and teaching *his* principles, leave sectarians and image-worshippers to jangle and split straws about their distinguishing frontlets. What foundation need they other than this which he has laid for them: - "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself. Upon these hang all the law and the prophets."*[112]

It was common for Owenites to focus upon Christ, who had identified 'the *love* of riches [as] the root of all evil', in contrast to the subsequent prophets and priests who had forgotten this lesson. [113] J.G. Clarke could announce that socialists had 'entered the garden of CHRISTIANITY, selected its *fairest flowers*, extracted the *honey of the system*, or its *moral*' in order to unite all 'in the bond of Brotherly Love'.[114] Insofar as this represented a conception of religion which was ethical, practical, and benevolent, focused upon mutual aid and ethical conduct, it offered a resource upon which socialists could draw. Further, because many of the philosophical conflicts which divided Owenites and anti-socialist Christians related to abstract questions about responsibility or Original Sin, the tensions which existed between Owenite theory and Christian theology were not found with popular religion.

This popular religion also offered a resource for other contemporary political movements. Many Chartists and trade unionists turned to scripture to support their denunciations of the rich and their pleas for a more just society.[115] These Christian radicals also drew confidence in their prospects of success from the assurance that they were agents of God's work, and their political activities had 'the

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[111] *NMW*, no.9, 3, 'Socialism and the Church' (16 January 1841), 34.
[112] *NMW*, no.12, 2, 'Notes of a Looker-On' (8 July 1843), 11.
[113] *NMW*, no.6, 54, – 'On the Existence of Moral Evil…- Essay XV' – X. (2 November 1839), 851.
[114] Clarke, *The Christian's Looking-Glass*, 1.
[115] Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland*, 35. Scripture was a versatile resource. During the Chartist agitations of the 1838 and 1839, it was more common for appeal to be made to 'the Old Testament God of Battles and Lord of Hosts through whom the People would and should avenge wrongs and crush injustice'. With the cooler mood of the 1840s, Chartists began to instead emphasise the example of the human Jesus. Prothero, 'Chartism and French Radicalism in the 1830s and 1840s', 46–47.

character of a crusade'.[116] Chartists often proudly described the humble origins and experience of oppression which they shared with Christ, who had 'come to earth as a working man' and 'been crucified on the social rack like they'.[117] At the centre of this Chartist theology was 'a God of Justice who had endowed men with social and political rights', the same rights which the Chartists were seeking to reclaim in their political activities.[118] Their resistance to the control of the churches over the content of Christianity was reflected in the common Chartist tactic of visiting churches en masse to demand that the vicar preach on texts which Chartists understood to support their cause, such as 'if any will not work, neither shall he eat'.[119] Elsewhere, Edward Berenson identified rural Catholic villagers in mid-nineteenth-century France as espousing a form of 'populist religion' which included an understanding of religious ritual and meaning as belonging to the community rather than the priesthood. Berenson argued that this form of religion enabled cooperation between those villagers and urban 'democ-soc' politicians.[120] It helped to make progressive and democratic ideas meaningful for rural villagers, and provided a source of empowerment in its appeals to Jesus as a humble carpenter who bore a message of equality and fraternity.[121] Such accounts are concerned with the ways in which a popular form of religion is enlisted to empower, to bolster political arguments, as a source of authority, or to enable the development of coalitions. Instead, I am interested in populist religion as influencing the theological outlook of Owenites themselves.

4.2.4 Rational Dissent

The fourth feature of the religious context which was available to Owenites as they reflected upon the nature of religion was the tradition of Rational Dissent. Dissenters were those who refused to endorse the Thirty-nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer which lay out the tenets and practices of

[116] Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit*, 207.
[117] Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist Struggle 1838-1842', 112; Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 104.
[118] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 104.
[119] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 334–36. Strikingly, this 'old Chartist tactic' was also adopted by the Marxist Social Democratic Federation at the end of the nineteenth century, with members of the SDF 'interrupting church services to demand sermons about poverty and justice' Dorrien, *Social Democracy in the Making*, 88.
[120] Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics*, 1–74.
[121] Berenson, 'A New Religion of the Left'.

Anglicanism. The category itself had been created by the 1662 Act of Uniformity; when around a fifth of clergymen refused to use the Book of Common Prayer as required by the Act, they became 'nonconformists' or 'Dissenters'.[122] Dissenters rejected the Established Church as corrupt and unchristian, arguing that Establishment undermined freedom of belief. By the early nineteenth century, the term 'Dissent' was used to characterise all Protestants who declined to conform to Anglican doctrine, embracing a huge number of denominations and organisations. This included those of fundamentally contrasting theologies, sensibilities, and social standing, from 'Ranting' Primitive Methodists to the rational forms of Unitarianism fashionable among the rising industrial middle classes. Some rejected the Book of Common Prayer because they emphasised the direct, immediate relationship between God and the believer, a view which invited mysticism, apocalypticism, and prophecy. Others emphasised strict biblicism, dissenting from those elements of Tudor Anglicanism which they regarded as unscriptural.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a newer form of 'Rational Dissent' had emerged. Rational Dissenters maintained that reason should be used to interpret scripture and that religious truths could be identified through rational discussion and debate.[123] Most (although not all) Rational Dissenters were Unitarians, who rejected Original Sin, the Trinity, and predestination, and argued that religious progress was possible.[124] Rational Dissenters argued that interaction with the state corrupted Christianity and rejected human claims of authority in theological matters. Such views informed their social and political outlook. They were often suspicious of the state as untrustworthy and potentially repressive. They tended to hold more optimistic accounts of human nature, and to reject moralistic views of the poor as blameworthy for their suffering, arguing instead that the poor were themselves victims of government negligence. [125] Rational Dissenters played an important role in the emergence and development of political radicalism.[126] Their theological commitments motivated Rational

[122] Floyd, *Church, Chapel and Party*, 1–5.
[123] Philp, 'Rational Religion and Political Radicalism'.
[124] Philp, 36.
[125] Ditchfield, 'English Rational Dissent and Philanthropy', 195–99; Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, 142–44.
[126] This is also true of other forms of Dissent. James E. Bradley described nonconformity as 'a midwife to radical political behaviour among the artisans'. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 423; See also, McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth Century England*, 64.

Dissenters to participate in radical politics in order to pursue goals such as the removal of the civil disabilities they faced; the expression of Unitarian beliefs (i.e. the belief that God was One and not a Trinity) had been illegal until a Relief Act was passed in 1813, although even after this date Unitarians were vulnerable to prosecution for blasphemy. The culture of Rational Dissent also encouraged inquisitive and critical habits of mind, with an emphasis upon close reading of scripture and the rejection of claims to authority.[127] Radical ideas were influenced by Rational Dissenters' confidence that reason and truth could resolve social conflict, and foundational radical texts were written by Dissenters such as Richard Price and Joseph Priestley.[128] Further, Rational Dissenters provided the social infrastructure of coffee houses, literary salons, publishing houses, and debating clubs which enabled communication and the sharing of radical ideas.[129] Although the number of Unitarians was relatively small, they tended to hold considerable economic and political power in many of the northern manufacturing cities in which Owenism was also popular.[130]

The influence of Rational Dissenters upon Owenism is clearest in virtue of Dissenters' commitment to the creation of a more 'rational' form of religion. This vision of a more 'rational' religion was not one in which the role of revelation would be diminished or limited. Instead, reason was instead to complement revelation, offering the means to understand scripture. A more 'rational' religion was one which resisted the claims to authority by the Established Church, which sought to add unscriptural creeds and confessions and to impose subscription to articles of faith. Such additions to the Bible offended against the principle of *sola scriptura*, according to which scripture alone, when interpreted using human reason, conveyed Christian truth. Understandings of reason as hostile to revelation were, they argued, promoted by their Anglican opponents, who sought to discredit them. For these Dissenters, the increasing influence of reason on religion was not a challenge to, but rather a tool to aid interpretation of, revelation.[131] This is not to say, however, that Dissenters enjoyed a consensus about the precise role of reason. They all agreed that reason was necessary, while rejecting the deist

[127] Philp, 'Rational Religion and Political Radicalism', 40; Pickering and Tyrrell, 'In the Thickest of the Fight', 465.
[128] Philp, 'Rational Religion and Political Radicalism', 38–40.
[129] Philp, 40.
[130] The 1851 census counted only 250 Unitarian chapels and roughly 50,000 congregants. Mann, *Census of Great Britain, 1851*.
[131] Hickman, *Eighteenth-Century Dissent and Cambridge Platonism*, 75–91.

idea that reason might be sufficient or that reason might be able to arbitrate questions about the truth of revelation. But they did disagree about the confidence one should have in reason. While Richard Price urged epistemic humility, Joseph Priestley was more confident, arguing that when each critically studied scripture the power of reason would inevitably bring convergence upon the truth. Despite these disagreements, all Rational Dissenters agreed that a more 'rational' religion was not a more secular or diluted version. Instead, it represented a form of religion which excluded the corrupting claims to authority and tradition of clerical interpreters.

There has been a recognition of the influence of Rational Dissenters upon Owenite socialists. Robert Owen had encountered Unitarian ideas during his decade-long participation in the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society at the end of the eighteenth century, and these ideas would have been 'highly significant' in shaping his understandings of education and of the environmental formation of character.[132] Other scholars have identified Joseph Priestley's necessitarianism and his 'millennial optimism and scientific rationalism' as an important influence upon Owen.[133] Or attributed Owen's conception of truth as singular and absolute to Dissenter William Godwin, with whom Owen had spent time while composing his *A New View of Society*.[134] The influence of Dissent has also been cited as informing the 'Owenite opposition to narrow specialisation', influencing their development of 'a new notion of the unified personality', and encouraging Owenites to reject patriotism and martial virtue in favour of pacific politeness.[135] And there were certainly influential Dissenters among the Owenites, including Unitarians John Finch and William Hawkes Smith.[136] Yet, the influence of the Rational Dissenters' conception of a rational religion upon Owenite socialism has not been noted.

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[132] Siméon, *Robert Owen's Experiment at New Lanark*, 23.
[133] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 115–19; Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 183–84.
[134] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 183–84.
[135] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 54–57. More implausibly, W.H. Oliver has suggested that Owen's argument that the original purity of human nature had been perverted by institutions was itself a modification of the argument of Dissenters that the original purity of Christianity had been corrupted by the priesthood. Oliver, 'Owen in 1817: The Millennialist Moment', 166–69.
[136] One article in the *New Moral World* noted that Unitarians have promoted 'a sound, a utilitarian philosophy of morals' and urge the adoption of a 'national system of education', but that their means, 'preaching and publishing sermons' have achieved nothing. The article urges Unitarians to become Socialists because '[w]hat is Unitarianism, stripped of dogma, but *theoretical* Socialism, while Socialism is *practical* Unitarianism'. *NMW* no.8, 15, 'On Human Perfectibility' (10 October 1840), 238.

In addition to the search for a more rational religion, Owenites did also complain about Establishment, the alliance between Church and state which was a principal concern of Dissenters. Owenites, such as William Hawkes Smith denounced '*state* religions, as inevitably oppressive to the community, and tending to promote avarice, worldly-mindedness, and all sorts of evil passions in their ministers'.[137] John Finch, meanwhile, complained that England 'has taken a certain quantity of *Popery*, *Protestantism*, *and other ingredients*, mixed them up in a patent quack medicine, called State Religion'.[138] James Elishama Smith bemoaned that 'there is no greater blasphemy on earth than a state religion. it is just as absurd as a state astronomy'; the 'mere dictum of his Majesty's Ministers' declares some articles to be true and others false – Act of Parliament determines what people have to believe by law.[139] On this account, Establishment is an 'unnatural and pernicious union of religion and politics' which obstructs the achieving of religious truth and leads to persecution.[140] These were complaints which were shared with Dissenters. However, while endorsing the principle of Dissent, Smith doubted the sincerity of Dissenters. He argued that, while seeking the disestablishment of the Church of England, Dissenters still wanted the state to retain its Christian character. Smith warned that Dissenters would then seek to use their power to persecute those with whom they disagreed, and all would see that 'the boasted liberality of dissenterism was a mere name'. John Minter Morgan also criticises the pernicious influence of the existing Establishment when he notes that because bishops are indebted to the aristocracy for their 'mitre, crook, and comfortable stall', they therefore recognise themselves to be bound to promote acquiescence and subservience to the holders of power. Minter Morgan satirically attributes the lines to the Archbishop of Canterbury: 'chief that precept hold we in esteem,/ Which taught obedience to

[137] *NMW* no.2, 94 'Remarks Called Forth by a Perusal of "The Social Bible"' – 'W.H.S.' (13 August 1836), 333.
[138] *NMW* no.4, 201, 'Ralahine – Letter XIV' – John Finch (1 September 1838), 364. John Finch did reverse this position in his 1841 *A Reformed Established Church*, stating that 'mature reflection has led me to renounce dissent and voluntaryism, and to become equally zealous for a religion established by law and a priesthood paid by the state, with such a reform in both as shall be in accordance with the spirit of the enlightened age in which we live'. He argued that the precarious income of ministers dependent upon payments from their congregations left them fearful of offending their followers and that Dissenting ministers were also required to subscribe to doctrines and this impeded the pursuit of truth. Further, because their continued remuneration depended upon their perceived authority, such ministers would be incentivised to impugn any potential challenge to their authority. This is 'the true reason why the priesthood will not permit us to have an efficient system of national education, untrammelled with their soul-enslaving creeds and dogmas'. In the same text, Finch uses the threat of '*Chartist churches, consisting almost entirely of the working classes, without creeds, and without paid preachers*' to warn existing churches and chapels of the need for change. Finch, *A Reformed Established Church*, 4–7; 11.
[139] Smith, *The Antichrist, or, Christianity Reformed*, 82.
[140] Smith, 84.

the power supreme,/ 'Render to Caesar all of Caesar's things;' - /That text harmonious to the ear of kings; Useful to all, if people would obey, - Taxes and tithes without reluctance pay;/ And with submissive patience humbly wait,/ To see all righted in a future state'.[141] Because the clergy are controlled by the state, and rely upon the state for the progress of their careers, they are incentivised to promote acquiescence, obedience, the enthusiastic payment of '[t]axes and tithes', and to decline to apply Christian ethical standards to worldly government by '[r]ender[ing] to Caesar all of Caesar's things'. For Minter Morgan, the liberation of the clergy from the influence of the state then offers a mechanism to reduce this pressure.

Despite these parallels, there were significant dissimilarities between the philosophies of Rational Dissent and Owenite socialism, not least in their attitudes to individualism and equality. Rational Dissenters were often drawn from the aspiring, industrial middle-classes, and although they sought political change to extend toleration, they were often trenchantly opposed to any more radical egalitarianism.[142]

In Chapter 4, I have sought to identify the theological context of the Owenite engagement with religion. Where scholars have interrogated this engagement, as described in Chapter 2, it has often been detached from the particular features of early nineteenth century Britain. I have suggested that the Owenite engagement with religion should be seen as both a response to deficiencies which were particular to this context and as part of an ongoing theological conversation. I identified three features of the context which prompted their critique and which motivated their search for an alternative: the extent and ferocity of religious dissensus, the conservatism of the Church of England, and the theology of the 'evangelical revival'. I then noted four sources which were available as they formulated an alternative: natural theology, popular religion, deism, and Rational Dissent. In doing so, I sought to clarify the novelty of the Owenite engagement with religion described in Chapter 3.

[141] Morgan, *The Reproof of Brutus*, 166–67.
[142] Philp, 'Rational Religion and Political Radicalism', 36; Knight and Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, 19–36.

Chapter 5: Owenite Religion as a Socialist Religion

Chapter 3 described how Owenites offer a re-imagination of the concept of religion. In Chapter 4, I identified the theological context of the Owenite engagement with religion. I noted those features of the context to which Owenites were responding and the resources which were available as they formulated an alternative account of the nature of religion. This chapter will describe how this project of re-imagination, and their broader project of religious reform, relates to their wider socialism. It allows us to understand not only *that* Owenites were concerned with the re-imagination of religion, but how important this re-imagination was, and how it connects to their wider thought and action.

In Section 5.1, I present three different ways of thinking about the relationship between socialism and religious interests. This is not intended to be an exhaustive taxonomy, but instead an identification of three prominent ways of thinking about the importance of religious concerns to socialism. The first understands an interest in religious questions as reflective of a form of eccentricity which is irrelevant to socialism (Section 5.1.1). The second understands religious influences as an archaic barrier to the development of mature socialism (Section 5.1.2). The third understands religious interests as merely instrumental (Section 5.1.3). In each case, these accounts suggest that such interests are unimportant or un-socialist. In the remainder of the chapter, I reject these accounts. I show instead that Owenites understood themselves to be undertaking a project of religious reform which was grounded in their socialism and essential to the achievement of their goals.

In Section 5.2, I argue that many Owenites understood their own socialism as a rival to contemporary and a successor to previous movements of religious reform. They identify themselves as participants in an ongoing process of religious reform, a process reflected in contemporary events and advanced by historical events such as the Reformation. They understand their rivals as being the Mormons and the Oxford Movement as much as the Corn Law League or the Chartists.

In Section 5.3, I suggest an objection that this simply reflects the typical understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in early nineteenth-century Britain. Responding to this objection helps to clarify the nature of my argument.

In Section 5.4, I show first how many Owenites offered a religious analysis which was rooted in the philosophical commitments which animated the movement, in the same conception of social problems as explained by error, perpetuated by a failure to comprehend the natural harmony of interests, and soluble with the identification of a single rational truth (Section 5.4.1). Far from being merely instrumental to deeper goals, this shows how they offer an account of socialism which was grounded in their socialist philosophy. In Chapter 3, I noted that an Owenite account of religion, in virtue of its relationship with increasing knowledge about the world, with the solidarity essential to the operation of communities, and with the promotion of morality, is closely entwined with the philosophy of socialism. The argument of Section 5.4.1 offers further support to these claims. Next, I show how religious reform is understood by many Owenites as central to the success of socialism. I show how false religion is a basic impediment to the success of socialism in virtue of the way that rancorous religious division, rooted in theological errors which lead to the multiplication of sects and the sharpening of hostility between those sects, obstructs the mutuality and cooperation which are necessary for socialism (Section 5.4.2). Socialism can triumph only when religious errors are dispelled and replaced with religious truth. Finally, I note how many Owenites argued that socialism provided the institutional and material preconditions which enable religious virtue to flourish, and therefore that the popularisation of religious virtue offered a compelling reason to endorse socialism (Section 5.4.3). It is not the case that religious concerns mark an eccentric retreat from socialism or an impediment to the emergence of socialism. Instead, for these Owenites, socialism requires religious reform and nurtures religious virtue.

5.1 Religiosity as Un-socialist or Unimportant

In Section 5.1, I note three ways in which scholars have understood the relationship between Owenite socialism and religious interests or influences. First, that the pursuit of religious interests reflects a form of eccentricity, an abandonment of socialism (Section 5.1.1). Second, that religious influences offer an archaic encumbrance to the development of mature socialism (Section 5.1.2). Both of these two accounts assume that religious interests are marginal or a barrier to the emergence of an

appropriate socialist economic analysis or political strategy. The third account suggests that religious interests are merely instrumental, being explained by the need to demystify an ideological illusion or to reassure former believers (Section 5.1.3).

In the subsequent sections I will reject these three accounts. I will argue that many Owenites understand themselves as participants in a process of religious change, as inheriting the legacy of the Reformation and rivalling movements of religious reform including the Oxford Movement. I will argue that this Owenite critique of existing religions is not merely instrumental to temporal goals, but instead represents a principled engagement grounded in their philosophical commitment. I will then show how many Owenites understand religious falsehoods as a barrier to the triumph of socialism, and therefore that socialism requires religious truth. Finally, I will show that many Owenites understood the fact that socialism creates the conditions for the popularisation of religious virtue, and therefore the conditions for the popularisation of true religion, as an important reason to endorse socialism. In each case, this suggests that far from being an eccentric distraction, an archaic encumbrance, or merely instrumental, this Owenite project of religious reform is grounded in their philosophy and essential to their conception of the means and end of socialisms.

5.1.1 Religiosity as Eccentric

The first account of the relationship between socialism and religious interests suggests that these interests represent a form of eccentricity, a retreat and distraction from serious socialism. To reflect upon religious truth was to turn away from socialism, withdrawing from concrete, real socialism into other-worldly religious speculations.[1] According to A.L. Morton, after the collapse of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union in 1834, 'Owenism was to continue as a sect, active and lively,

[1] I briefly discussed this shift in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.1.3.2), which noted how Owenites have been characterised as a 'sect'. I rejected the use of such a characterisation for two reasons. The first is that a description as a 'sect' carries broad implications about an organisation's activities, ultimate goals, ethos, and the social factors which explain these features. To describe Owenites as a 'sect' in virtue of their social calendar implies, even where unintended, something about the ultimate goals of their activities and about the social causes of their adoption of the sectarian social form. The second is that it implies that the adoption of a 'religious' form of social organisation entails the abandonment of worldly, political aims in favour of a withdrawal into ideological purity and social isolation. It was also raised in Section 2.2, in which I noted how conceptions of the historic emergence of socialism and trade unionism have informed a neglect of the religious interests of Owenites.

but outside the main stream of working-class life', so that 'as the years went by [Owenite Socialism] became *more abstract and remote from reality*'.[2] G.D.H. Cole dismisses these years after 1834 as a period of 'Old Age' in which Owen was experiencing 'long years of…decay' and had 'lost that practical grip', leading Cole to argue that one should '[j]udge him, not by his old age, but by the works of his manhood'.[3] After 1834, when Owenites began to 'preach the "Rational Religion"', Owenism was clearly much less "socialistic", in any ordinary sense of the term, than it had been when its working-class influence was at its height'.[4] George Lichtheim similarly characterises the search for a rational religion as marking Owen's retreat from practical activity.[5] The concern with religious questions is a response to failure, part of becoming more 'remote from reality' and less 'socialistic'.[6] According to Keith Taylor, the "'natural" socio-economic constituency for the growth of socialism' was among 'artisans and skilled workers' who were attracted to 'co-operative organisations and trade unions'. Yet, Owenism 'became less successful as it moved away from that cultural basis into the realms of religious sectarianism and millenarianism'.[7] Socialism is 'naturally' a matter of artisans engaging in co-operation and trade unionism, and religious interests represent the 'move away' from this basis. Edward Royle argues that '*the authentic voice of socialism* as understood by the artisans and factory workers of the manufacturing districts' was hostile to the Central Board's adoption of a 'pseudo-Christian religion'.[8] Interest in religious questions was an eccentric diversion from the true concerns of socialism, from the sober aspirations of 'artisans and factory workers' seeking economic advancement and political power. Often such interests are explained as a response to the failure of practical activities such as the GNCTU, or as a retreat from the 'natural' constituency of socialism, who were concerned only with the practicalities of cooperation and trades unionism and not the strange interests in theology. On this account, religious concerns are an eccentric retreat from socialism.

[2] Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen*, 46; 48 [my italics].
[3] Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 312; 321–22.
[4] Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, 131.
[5] Lichtheim, *The Origins of Socialism*, 123.
[6] Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen*, 48.
[7] Taylor, 'Explaining the Origins of Socialism', 396.
[8] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 77 [my italics].

5.1.2 Religiosity as Outdated

A second way in which scholars have presented the relationship between Owenite socialism and religious interests is as an outdated influence upon socialism which must be shed before political maturity can be achieved. Religious interests or influences are archaic, and an encumbrance to the development of a properly socialist programme of economic critique and political transformation.

Gregory Claeys identifies religious influences as bearing upon the 'communitarian' strand of socialism, which contended within Owenism with a secular economic socialism, marked by a 'particular economic analysis' and the 'idea of the interventionist state'.[9] These influences include those of the Anabaptists, whose Augustinian dualism encouraged the repudiation of participation in government, and of the Diggers, who advocated 'reversion to apostolic community'.[10] Such influences encourage the renunciation of political participation and compete against the recognition that only the 'interventionist state' can offer a solution to the economic problems of an emerging industrial economy. This is a picture of competing strands within Owenite socialism, of 'religious and economic socialism usually at opposite ends of a spectrum'.[11] On the one hand is the residuum of an earlier Christian ethical just price tradition, moved by an intensity of aspiration and a vision of possibility, guided by an account of the morally good life, but lacking any political strategy or economic argument. On the other hand, is a rational, economic strand, rooted in an analysis of labour as a factor of production and technology as shifting the power balance between capital and labour. It is moved by the greater efficiency of a cooperative economic structure, and felicific benefits of social reorganisation. It is sensitive to questions of political strategy, reflective about the mechanisms of change, and concerned about the historical conditions conducive to the achievement of transformation. And it was necessary to escape from distracting religious controversies in order to develop this 'economic socialism':

> The creation of economic socialism must also be understood as in some respects a result of complete exasperation over the problems caused by the endless public debates on religion

[9] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 318; 290.
[10] Claeys, 42.
[11] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, 189; 154.

> and sexual relations into which many Owenites fell and then became completely enmired, and which virtually crippled the branch movement in some areas.[12]

This progressive trend away from 'debates on religion and sexual relations' and towards 'economic socialism' continues until, by the 1850s, "'socialism" had lost many of the theological and philosophical connotations with which it had been particularly heavily burdened in the early 1840s'.[13] Socialism managed to escape the 'burden' of its theological implications and overcome the 'crippling' debates on religion, developing into 'economic socialism'. This development involved Owenites shedding their interest in the Established Church's claims to theological truth, an interest which was 'out of date', merely a 'version of eighteenth-century rational dissent' which was unsuitable to the new era.[14] By contrast, it was their reflection upon early industrialism and advancing mechanisation which marked Owenites as the first socialists, the bearers of a modern outlook appropriate to their economic conditions.[15] The same idea of religious interests as barrier to the development of a mature socialism is found in Gareth Stedman Jones' account. I noted in Chapter 1 Section 2.3, that Stedman Jones identified Owenite socialists as failing to develop an adequate account of politics because of the religious character of their socialism. According to Stedman Jones, the 'most important' way in which 'the religious origins of socialism continue[d] to affect its subsequent character' was in 'the place assigned by socialism to politics', in the relegation of politics to a merely instrumental role and in the indifference to forms of government.[16] Such a lack of interest in politics, the result of socialism's 'religious origins', represents an encumbrance to the development of a successful socialism.

5.1.3 Religiosity as Instrumental

A third account suggests that Owenite religious interests were merely instrumental, being pursued only in advance to advance other, temporal goals. This account maintains that religious questions were relevant or significant only insofar as they served more fundamental social or political commitments.

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[12] Claeys, 152.
[13] Claeys, 186.
[14] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 87; James, 'Recent Tendencies in the History of Political Thought', 397.
[15] Beer, *A History of British Socialism*.
[16] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 187.

There are two strands to this conception of an instrumental relationship. The first is that the religious critique offered by Owenites was merely instrumental. The second is that the positive engagement of Owenites, adopting religious language or advertising a rational religion, was merely instrumental.

The first strand of this instrumental account maintains that Owenites offered a religious critique only because hegemonic religious ideas were an obstacle to the adoption of socialist views about the mutability of social arrangements or the nature of human personality. I noted in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.1.2) that Owenites participated in theological debates with members of the clergy, debates over subjects such as original sin, responsibility, the prospects of significant improvements in moral character. According to an instrumental account, such debates were motivated *only by* the instrumental need to defeat the arguments of the clerical opponents. As discussed in Chapter 3, Owenites faced proponents of an Evangelical theology who affirmed the truth of Original Sin, argued that humans bore substantive responsibility for their actions and their outcomes, and offered justifications for the immutable existence of poverty. The widespread belief in such claims was an obstruction to the endorsement of Owenite arguments and therefore obstructed the advance of socialism. Similarly, religious institutions conferred legitimacy upon other institutions which Owenites perceived to be socially harmful, such as the divisive and individualising 'marriages of the priesthood'. In order to establish the falsehood of Original Sin or to prove the deleterious nature of existing marital arrangements, it was necessary to undermine the authority of hegemonic religious institutions. This could be achieved by identifying discrepancies between the Gospels, raising questions about their authorship, or noting the possible sources for the stories of Scripture in Zoroastrian and Babylonian mythology. Doing so then serves to advance Owenite goals because it removes barriers to the endorsement of their understanding of human responsibility or to their critique of marital arrangements. On this account, Owenites engagement in religious critique *only because* religious institutions confer authority on anti-socialist arguments. According to this account, Owenites reflected upon religions only as this-worldly, temporal institutions which obstructed the widespread endorsement of Owenite ideas. Social transformation was primary, and religion mattered only insofar as it advanced or obstructed that transformation. As Ralph Miliband summarised the argument of the Owenites: '[r]eligion and property, among other institutions, had played their part in the corruption

and degradation of man. They must therefore be swept aside for the sake of the new moral society'.[17] Religion had 'corrupted and degraded' humans and must *therefore* be 'swept aside' to establish socialism. Edward Royle attributes the same instrumental attitude to Owenites including Charles Southwell, who 'were interested in socialism as a democratic movement for the material improvement, self-help and education of the working classes, and, so long as religion appeared opposed to these things, socialists were bound to be anti-religious'.[18] Socialists were 'anti-religious' *only because* religion was a barrier to the material advancement of the working classes. R.H. Pankhurst also offers an instrumental explanation of the Owenite approach to religion. He attributes William Thompson's concern with religious institutions to their obstruction of the emancipation of women, the extension of education, and the reform of marriage.[19] And explains the Owenite approach to religion as resulting from the clergy being 'irreconcilable foes on all issues they [early Socialists] held dear'.[20] For these Owenites, concern with religion was merely instrumental, motivated by temporal concerns and by the need to defeat the arguments of their anti-socialist opponents.

The second strand of the instrumental account identifies the positive engagement of Owenites with religious questions and language as itself merely instrumental. Owenites sang hymns and read from a Social Bible because they had 'quite deliberately adapted what they considered useful elements from the enemy's armoury', adopting hymns to provide variety and to create a communal experience.[21] In adopting religious trappings to advance their socialist goals, the Owenites are counted among the 'very many radicals [who] clearly felt a need to clothe their activities in a religious garb and even ceremonial'.[22] This also included the language that they used, which was adopted to entice and reassure prospective socialists, presenting 'a secular morality which was construed as "religious" primarily insofar as this was a useful means of drawing away adherents from the various Christian churches'.[23] Their use of millennial rhetoric was 'explicable by need to find media for the transmission of

[17] Miliband, 'The Politics of Robert Owen', 234.
[18] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 71.
[19] Pankhurst, *William Thompson*, 68.
[20] Pankhurst, 122.
[21] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 98.
[22] Prothero, *Artisans & Politics*, 263.
[23] Claeys, 'From "Politeness" to "Rational Culture"', 25.

Owenism'.[24] And, their use of '"religious" constructions' is explained by Stephen Yeo as resulting from the relationship between religion and '[c]onsciously invented means of belonging'.[25] Similarly, I identified in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.1.4) how scholarly accounts of the Owenite 'rational religion' have argued that this religion was merely a tool to inculcate an enriched morality. In these interpretations, different facets of the Owenites' adoption of religious language or reflection upon 'rational religion' are explained as merely instrumental. In some accounts, this is identified as quite intentional: activities are 'cloth[ed]', hymns are 'deliberately adapted', religious adornment is added to a secular morality because this is a 'useful means'. In others, it is less clear whether intention is being attributed, for example, where religious constructions are adopted in order to fulfil the need for 'consciously invented means of belonging'. However, each exemplifies an understanding of the Owenites' positive engagement with religious influences or interests as merely instrumental to deeper, temporal, socialist goals.

In Section 5.1, I presented three different ways of thinking about the relationship between socialism and religious interests: of the pursuit of religious interests as a form of eccentricity, of religious influences as a barrier to the maturation of socialism, and of religious interests as merely instrumental. In the remainder of the chapter, I reject these accounts. I show instead that many Owenites understood themselves to be undertaking a project of religious reform which was grounded in their socialism and essential to the achievement of their goals.

5.2 Socialists as Religious Reformers

In Section 5.2, I describe how many Owenites understand their socialism as a project of religious reform. This section will demonstrate how these Owenites often turn to examples of religious progress in considering how social change occurs. The selection of events reflects their focus and their conception of the necessary conditions for the achievement of socialism. In particular, they identify the Reformation as offering a source of legitimation in virtue of its serving as a shibboleth for

[24] Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 91.
[25] Yeo, 'Towards Co-Operative Politics', 28.

Protestants, as representing an unfinished project which socialism would realise, and as offering a model of change for socialists. And the identification of rivals involves a recognition of the other contending accounts of how social distress will be repaired and of the other movements competing for prospective adherents. In identifying these rivals, they regard the repeal of the Corn Laws as equivalent to the attempts of the Quakers to achieve social change; each represents an attempt to address social problems, and each represents a rival to socialism.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated the nature of the socialist conception of religion. In this section, I show the centrality of this re-imagination to the Owenite understanding of social change. They understand shifts in religious understandings or in the reorganisation of religious institutions as heralding, or as creating opportunities for, the achievement of socialism. It is those shifts which demonstrate the possibility or imminence of change, which show that people search for ways to make the world anew. Many Owenites perceive movements such as the Oxford Movement or the Mormons as each seeking change in the same way as socialists. They understand themselves as inheriting the legacy and realising the potential of the Reformation, and they recognise the Reformation as offering a model of change to be imitated and adopted. In each instance, they perceive change as occurring through persuasion, through the transformation of a social ethos rather than political structures.

This marks a contrast with their contemporaries. Chartists were more likely to cite Wat Tyler and the Peasants' Revolt as exemplifying the bold collective resistance of the people against corrupt tyranny in an attempt to restore lost rights. They presented the People's Charter as an attempt to complete the work of the Magna Carta, to reclaim the Anglo-Saxon rights which had been abrogated by the Norman Yoke.[26] The Peterloo Massacre, John Wilkes, and Major Cartwright all figured prominently in Chartist iconography, and they were all commemorated in calendars and almanacs and celebrated in toasts.[27] The American Revolution was celebrated as 'a model and an inspiration', as bringing about the birth of a country of virtuous republicanism, in contrast to Britain's decadent aristocratic rule.[28] For Chartists, America offered a paragon to be imitated, a country established by workers on a foundation

[26] Chase, *Chartism*, 8; Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, 90–178.
[27] Roberts, *Chartism, Commemoration and the Cult of the Radical Hero*, 3–20.
[28] Turner, 'Chartism, Bronterre O'Brien and the "Luminous Political Example of America"', 43–49.

of limited government, a free press, and constitutionally enshrined political freedoms.[29] Chartists identified events such as the signing of the Magna Carta, the Peasant's Revolt, and the American Revolution as exemplifying resistance to tyranny and the achievement of political freedom.

5.2.1 Religious Progress and Social Change

In Section 5.2.1, I note that, in describing the change which socialism would bring, many Owenites often turn to examples of religious reform. They select such examples to illustrate the process by which change would occur or the nature of that change. Or in order to demonstrate the social changes which created opportunities for the emergence of socialism or reflected the increasing prospects of the establishment of socialism. Events such as the reorganisation of religious institutions or the advance of toleration or the intensification of religious unrest are reported with excitement as demonstrating the fertility of the moment for socialism. Or instances of religious reform are selected as exemplifying the kind of change which socialism would bring. I describe, in particular, how the Reformation is adopted as illustrating the possibility of socialism and as furnishing a model for the change to be pursued by socialists. In situating themselves as inheriting and renewing the Reformation, Owenites imply their understanding of the kind of project in which they were engaged, their conception of the means and end of socialism. The selection of such events illustrates how many Owenites understood themselves to be participants in an ongoing process of religious reform, a process reflected in contemporary events and advanced by historical events such as the Reformation.

As an aside, it is important to note that the content of Owenite journals was shaped by publishing pressures, and, in particular, the stamp duty. The stamp duty was a levy applied to all newspapers, one of the 'taxes on knowledge' established in the early eighteenth century in order to stymy the mass circulation of potentially radical newspapers among the lower classes. It was the principal mechanism (alongside post-publication prosecutions for libel, blasphemy, and sedition) of control of the newspaper industry in nineteenth-century Britain.[30] In order to avoid the dilemma of either increasing

[29] Gregory Claeys discusses Owenite engagement with the example of America in Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*.
[30] Goldstein, *Political Censorship of the Arts and the Press*.

the sale price of the journal because of the stamp or being published as an unstamped newspaper, courting illegality and disrepute, the *New Moral World* declared that it was not a newspaper and therefore not liable to the stamp tax. In order to ensure that it would not to be viewed as a newspaper, it eschewed the publication of 'public news, intelligence, or occurrences', and instead 'kept scrupulously to reporting [only] Owenite activity'.[31] This offers some partial explanation as to why journals such as the *New Moral World* often included lengthy periods without mention of domestic legislation, international affairs, or social and political events. Even the death of King William IV and Coronation of Queen Victoria in 1837 went almost unremarked, and the frequent changes in Prime Minister were only rarely noted. Although the 'War of the Unstamped' succeeded in reducing the stamp tax from four pence to one pence in 1836, the tax was not abolished until the 1850s and it remained a considerable influence upon the publishing practices of many journals and newspapers.

Despite the constraints imposed by the Stamp Tax, the *New Moral World* demonstrates an interest in religious developments, as offering indications of the fertility of the social climate and as creating opportunities for change. At the start of a new year in 1841, the *New Moral World* surveys the British landscape, describing the most prominent trends, such as the rise of the 'Romish' Puseyites and their political opponents, the Scottish Dissenters, who represent the antithesis of the Anglo-Catholics.[32] It is noted that there is 'a revolutionary state of opinion in ecclesiastical matters [which] finds its counter part in the political world'. The existence of such a 'revolutionary state of opinion', and the widespread acceptance of the fact of social problems, is demonstrated by the proliferation of solutions being advocated, which include abstinence, emigration, and colonisation. As the prime Owenite journal evaluates the movement's prospects, they discuss the existence of religious controversies about ceremony, tradition, and authority, reflecting their understanding of the context in which they were

[31] Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', 111. The 1712 Stamp Act had defined a newspaper as 'a paper containing public news, intelligence, or occurrences, printed in Great Britain, to be dispersed and made public', and this was extended in 1836 to cover any paper which made 'any comments or observations thereupon, or [sic] any matter of Church or State' (HL Deb 24 May 1855 vol 138 c955).

[32] The term 'Puseyites' is another name for the Anglo-Catholic 'Oxford Movement' which was emerging in the 1830s and 1840s, and which included Regius Professor of Hebrew Edward Pusey. The 'Puseyites' sought to restore elements of medieval practice to the Anglican Church and understood the Church of England to be a branch of the Catholic church. See, for example, Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*.

engaging. They understand the ascendance of the Oxford Movement within the Church as an event which bears upon socialist ambitions.

It is common for Owenites to describe shifting religious currents as both creating opportunities for the advancement of socialism and demonstrating the existence of religious trends which were sympathetic to socialism. For example, in 1845, Prime Minister Robert Peel had proposed a significant increase in the annual 'Maynooth Grant' for a Catholic seminary in Ireland. The move angered ultra-Tory Anglicans, contributed to a split in Peel's Tories, and provoked a petition opposing the grant which collected a million signatures, but was ultimately passed by Parliament.[33] In response to the controversy, one Owenite declared that the fact that Peel, a 'devout Episcopalian' (i.e. an Anglican) was offering toleration to Irish Catholics of welcome proof of swift religious progress. Another Owenite asked whether this provided a precedent for Parliament to confer an annual grant for an educational establishment run by socialists comparable to that provided to the Maynooth seminar.[34] In each case, Owenites understood the Maynooth Grant as reflecting the advancing prospects of socialism, by demonstrating rising tolerance or by creating a precedent to which they could appeal in seeking funding.

In the *Union*, an Owenite journal edited by G.A. Fleming between 1842 and 1843, discussion of recent events in Parliament included a preponderant interest in both religious reform and religious contention. One article describes a recent House of Lords ruling against the Church of Scotland, on the possibility of disestablishment, and on the prospective emergence of a Presbyterian Catholic Church before observing that '[t]he revolution amongst the sects keeps pace with the revolution of industry, and is quite as important in its results'.[35] The 'revolution of industry' being described was the social change which created the material preconditions for the establishment of socialism; it was only the widespread adoption of labour-saving machinery which would allow reduced working hours alongside increased production. It is striking therefore that a change which was a precondition for the establishment of cooperative communities was perceived to be of comparable importance to a

[33] Skinner, 'Religion'.
[34] *NMW* no.13, 37, 'Maynooth versus Harmony' (8 March 1845), 289.
[35] *The Union* no.1, 6, 'Monthly Register - Politics' (1 September 1842), 240-5.

'revolution amongst the sects'. Questions about disestablishment or about the formation of a Presbyterian Catholic Church were presented as having a distinctive relevance to socialism. This perception is furthered by declaration that '[o]ur revolution is not political alone, but ecclesiastical also. Most important controversies are now in agitation throughout all the churches. The quarrel between the civil and ecclesiastical powers is proceeding apace'.[36] Such 'controversies…throughout all the churches' are keenly reported elsewhere in the *Union*. This includes, for example, the contention between the 'Puseyites' and Protestants as to whether marriage was a sacrament which could be administered only by Episcopalians, and therefore over the validity of half of British marriages. Such fiercely contested debates were typical of widespread social division, and demonstrated how 'a great authority is wanted to unite and satisfy all!'. Similarly, the attempts of churches to entrench their power by establishing colonial bishops or predictions by prophets like 'Friend Miller' about the End of Days are both reflective of the disintegration of the old world and the imminence of the new.[37] They are understood to be evidence as this disintegration in much the same way as the increasing prospects of war or the occurrence of emigration.[38]

One event which recurred frequently in Owenite arguments was the Reformation. It was common for Owenites to identify the Reformation as a precursor, as offering an example of a previous project of religious reform, a model for their project of social transformation and a precedent for the kind and scale of change they sought. The Reformation might seem an odd ancestor to be claimed by socialists promoting economic cooperation and advocating for the establishment of intentional communities. The foremost participants in the Reformation were members of the clergy, a group for whom Owenites often expressed disdain. Most were uninterested in social reorganisation or the redistribution of economic power, and it was the Reformation which saw the abolition of monastic traditions of common property.[39] It might also appear surprising given that Owenites often presented themselves as offering a radical repudiation of all existing social and intellectual structures. So novel was the 'new moral world' that, on Robert Owen's account, all existing books would be discarded because they had

[36] *The Union*, no.1, 5, 'Monthly Register – Politics' (1 August 1842), 170.
[37] *NMW* no.10, 30, 'Address of the Central Board' (26 March 1842), 308; *NMW* no.12, 47, 'Humanity's Home in the West' – New York Regenerator (18 May 1844), 371.
[38] *NMW* no.10, 30, 'Address of the Central Board' (26 March 1842), 308
[39] Lockley, 'Mapping Protestant Communalism'.

been based on a fundamental error (that humans formed their own characters). Further, scholars have also emphasised the novelty of Owenites, identifying them as the originators of socialism, cooperation, or trades unionism. Nonetheless, in identifying a precedent for their socialism, many Owenites turned to an historical process most closely associated with a German monk's critique of papal authority three centuries beforehand.

For nineteenth-century Britons, the Reformation and the heroic figure of Martin Luther did have a compelling rhetorical force. It represented resistance against the superstitious 'popery' of Roman Catholicism, and so served as the 'common property of all Protestants', uniting Anglicans who identified with the founding of the Established Church with Nonconformists who celebrated the shift away from ritualism and obscurantism.[40] Further, because anti-Catholicism was so central to understandings of what it was to be British, the Reformation was bound together with national identity.[41] The Reformation was also understood by many to be ongoing, with Catholic Ireland yet to have undergone the requisite transformation.[42] For Owenites to align themselves with the founding event of the Church of England, to identify themselves as the true descendants of the Reformation, was therefore a powerful rhetorical move. At times, the appeal to the Reformation appears to be narrowly strategic, as demonstrating, for example, the need for freedom of thought and expression. At the June 1840 celebration of Robert Owen's birthday, shortly after Abel Heywood was prosecuted for selling copies of Shelley's *Queen Mab*, Charles Southwell asked if Luther, Erasmus, or Melanchthon had been prosecuted in the way that Heywood was, 'what would have become of our Reformation, such as it is?'.[43] Similarly, Lloyd Jones justified Owen's refusal to state whether he believed in the Bible by appealing to a comparison with the refusal of Protestants to accept the edicts of the Catholic Church. As Jones argued, if Protestants had been denied their right to exercise their own judgement, then all would have continued to live under the rule of superstitious, mysterious, and foreign 'papism'.

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[40] Dixon, 'Martin Luther and the Reformation in Historical Thought', 411. Enthusiasm for the Reformation was not universal; members of the Oxford Movement, who emphasised the Church of England as a *via media* between Roman Catholicism and Puritanism, had a more ambivalent relationship with the Reformation. See Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part One*, 167–83.
[41] Colley, *Britons*.
[42] Wolffe, 'Crusading, Reformation and Pietism'.
[43] *NMW* no.7, 87, 'Annual Commemoration of Socialism' – From the "Sun" of Wednesday, June 10 (20 June 1840), 1319.

Owen's right to think and speak freely must similarly be protected.[44] For each of Charles Southwell and Lloyd Jones, the Reformation serves as a rhetorically effective example, demonstrating that the foundation of the established order had required exactly the freedoms which socialists now sought.

As well as using the example of the Reformation and the threat of Catholicism to prove the necessity of freedom of expression and the protection of private judgement, many Owenites also identify themselves as inheriting the true legacy and reviving the goals of the Reformation.[45] Often, this involved showing how the Reformation had betrayed its founding ideals, and how socialism promised to restore and honour those ideals. In an 1839 article in the *New Moral World*, 'Verax' declared that the goal of the Reformation had been the establishment of new educational institutions and the expulsion of 'all mummeries, superstition, and religious mystification out of the country'.[46] And Martin Luther had cleansed some of the 'numerous errors which darkened the minds of our forefathers' and enabled 'human reason…to develope itself'.[47] Yet, Verax argued, the Protestant clergy had swiftly abandoned this ambition in order to greedily appropriate the mystical powers of their Catholic predecessors. These Protestants, Verax suggests, are no better than the Catholics whom they sought to replace.[48] There is, however, a group who do pursue the goal of improving education and dispelling superstition: the Owenites. Robert Buchanan similarly identifies the unrealised promises of the Reformation and notes socialism's unique capacity to vindicate that potential. He bemoans that the people have been 'grossly cheated by the semblance of a Reformation without the substance'.[49] If the Reformation had been 'of healthy growth, arising from a settled conviction of the falsehood and corruption of old opinions and

[44] *NMW* no.9, 16, 'Progress of Social Reform, Bristol' – W. Chilton (17 April 1841), 246. Chilton was reporting a lecture by Lloyd Jones at Bristol.
[45] Owenites were not the only socialists to identify with the Reformation; Karl Kautsky identified Thomas More as an ancestor of German Socialism, while Thomas Munzer was lauded by Marx and Engels. Boer, 'Karl Kautsky's Forerunners of Modern Socialism'; Jansson, 'The Pure Teachings of Jesus'. Their determination to complete the Reformation places Owenites within the tradition of radical Protestants such as the Diggers, who denounced the Elizabethan settlement for halting the progress of reform. The Diggers argued that the true realisation of the Reformation required the abolition of the priesthood and of church courts, with legal punishments replaced by spiritual entreaties by the community and internal reflection. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 161. Gregory Claeys noted the similarities between Winstanley's and Owen's proposals for 'gerontocratic' age-based government, but neglected the existence of a common relationship to the Reformation. Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 42. In 1838 the New Moral World did publish Winstanley's pamphlet the 'New Law of Righteousness' over ten lengthy instalments although without identifying the author (between *NMW* no.5, 7 (8 December 1838), 101 and *NMW* no.5, 24 (6 April 1839), 381).
[46] *NMW* no.6, 44, 'Rapid Sketch of the Origin…No.5' – Verax (24 August 1839), 693.
[47] *NMW* no.6, 38, 'Rapid Sketch of the Origin…No.4' – Verax (11 July 1839), 598.
[48] *NMW* no.6, 44, 'Rapid Sketch of the Origin…No.5' – Verax (24 August 1839), 693.
[49] Buchanan, *A Concise History of Modern Priestcraft*, 7.

practices, a philosophical knowledge of the nature of belief, and the real objects of human society', then it would have brought an end to religious persecution and domination. It would have brought about a beneficent rearrangement of the institutions of the Church and of society. However, Buchanan argues, the Reformation arose not from a philosophical critique of society's institutions, but from 'Political causes'.[50] Yet, there is still an individual who has been striving to renew the Reformation, to deliver upon its immanent potential:

> For thirty years, Robert Owen has been endeavouring by every means in his power, to carry out the great work of Reformation, which Jesus Christ began, and which was partially carried into effect by his primitive followers, before the poison of priesthood drugged his doctrines.[51]

Others similarly complain that the first reformation, led by 'Wickliffe, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and others, called religious reformers' had merely succeeded in 'emancipat[ing] part of the priesthood from the absolute rule of the Roman Pontiffs' and that it had 'done little or nothing to enlighten the people'. By contrast, 'SOCIALISM is the first religious movement that promises to emancipate the people, not only from Roman absolutism, but also from the mystic influence of any sacerdotal power whatever'.[52] In virtue of their hostility to 'mystic' influences, their commitment to education, their recognition that the old beliefs were corrupted and false, socialists inherit the legacy of the Reformation and their rational system represents, for John Watts, the 'third' reformation.[53] These Owenites located their socialism as reviving and renewing the Protestant Reformation: repairing the moral and philosophical errors of the Church, cleansing corruptions, and restoring lost ethical purpose.

These socialists not only claimed legitimation by claiming to realise the immanent promise of the Reformation, but also argued that the Reformation offered an attractive prospective model of social change. They suggested that the Reformation offered a model of change which did not require legislative action or violent unrest, which did not require political changes nor was it administered by

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[50] Buchanan, 8.
[51] Buchanan, 4.
[52] *NMW* no.7, 85, 'Socialism the Hope of a Protestant Christian People' – 'A Rational Christian' (30 May 1840), 1280.
[53] *NMW* no.9, 13, 'Progress of Social Reform - Glasgow' - John Watts, (27 March 1841), 198. The 'Second Reformation' was an effort at the Protestant evangelisation of Catholic Ireland during the mid-nineteenth century pursued by conservative theologians. Whelan, *The Bible War in Ireland*.

the powerful. Instead it was a process in which the people came to reject false ideas and adopt true ideas as the foundation for widespread social change.[54] According to 'A Lover of Truth', the Reformation illustrates how change can occur and therefore how socialists must behave in order to bring about such change. First, socialists need to be patient because change occurs only gradually, with a millennium separating Constantine's adoption of Christianity and Luther's codification of a rational critique of the Papacy. Second, socialists must be humble, refusing to believe themselves infallible or behaving dogmatically. For 'A Lover of Truth', the Reformation provides the model which socialists must pursue.[55] Similarly, 'VCL' identifies the Reformation as a precedent for the change which socialists promote, noting that three centuries beforehand there had been a 'reformation among the religious order [which] had a powerful influence upon the faith and opinions of society', and asking 'whether another sort of reformation has not already begun among the industrious orders of society'.[56] James Elishama Smith announces that 'a new reformation [has] begun, the reformation of charity and liberty'. However, this novel reformation will differ from the previous replacement of 'Popery' by Protestantism. It will differ not only because it will be more glorious and enduring, but also in the way that it will be achieved. This new reformation will be achieved not by working to overthrow religious institutions but instead by focusing socialist attentions upon living well and acting morally towards others. It will be this which brings about the 'new reformation' and the replacement of Christianity.[57] Joshua Hobson also emphasises the centrality of a moral transformation in achieving a new 'reformation', arguing that because the 'Religion of Socialism…teach[es] us to promote to the utmost extent of our power the happiness of every man, woman, and child', the 'tendency of Socialism is, to effect a "reformation" in the practices of "fallen nature"'.[58] These Owenites presented the Reformation as a process of widespread social change comparable to that pursued by socialism. And they understood the Reformation as exemplifying the possibility of that change occurring through

[54]Given that the Reformation was brought about by moral persuasion and social critique, it is unclear whether it really is an adequate model for the change sought by Owenites, who maintained that an individual's beliefs were formed by their social structure and therefore that social transformation required material change.
[55] *NMW* no.9, 26, 'Truth of Prophecy' - 'A Lover of Truth' (3 July 1841), 405.
[56] *Crisis*, no.3, 9, 'A Peep into Old Society' – VCL (23 October 1833), 66.
[57] Smith, *The Antichrist, or, Christianity Reformed*, 11.
[58] Hobson, *Socialism as It Is!*, 71.

rational and peaceful persuasion rather than political upheaval, through the enrichment of societal morality rather than the implementation of legislative edicts.

This conception of the Reformation as a model of change is particularly striking given that critiques of Owenism have often focused upon the absence of a plausible account of how socialism would come about.[59] Such critiques have suggested that Owen's own environmental determinism was philosophically incoherent as a model of change, a 'fatalistic doctrine' and 'grand error' which foreclosed the achievement of change.[60] Or that the absence of popular suffrage posed an 'insuperable barrier[]' such that, in the absence of any credible understanding of how to overcome it, they resorted to hope in a 'leap of faith'.[61] Yet, for the Owenites described above, the Reformation provided an example of how significant social change occurs and how socialists could achieve that change. Far from facing 'insuperable barriers' or being practically neutered by an incoherent philosophy, they understood the Reformation to offer a clear precedent for the success of socialism. Further, the model of the Reformation differs from another account of the process of change which has often been attributed to Owenites: that of the 'Second Coming'.[62] On these accounts, it is suggested that Owenites understood the coming triumph of socialism as resembling the return of Christ, an event which occurs dramatically, suddenly, and without the participation of human agency.[63] As I noted in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.1.3.1), this is a politically impotent vision of change. And it is one which stands in contrast to that offered by the Reformation, an example of social change brought about through human endeavour, through rational critique of the foundations of religion, and through determined proselytization.

In identifying an example of the nature and degree of change they sought, many socialists turned to the Reformation, a process in which the sixteenth-century Catholic Church had faced scripturally-grounded challenges to its doctrinal authority. They conceived the Reformation as both anticipating

[59] Tawney, 'Robert Owen'; Barrow, 'Determinism and Environmentalism in Socialist Thought'.
[60] Mill, *A System of Logic*, VI.ii.3; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 865.
[61] Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 161.
[62] See, for example, Oliver, 'Owen in 1817: The Millennialist Moment'; Stedman Jones, 'Millennium and Enlightenment'.
[63] It is not the case that the Second Coming is always imagined as an event which occurs without the participation of human agency. See Lockley, *Visionary Religion and Radicalism*.

their own project of reform and as demonstrating the means to achieve their goals. They understood the Reformation as signifying the replacement of superstition by rational belief and the purification of corrupted institutions. This identification of parallels between socialists and the Reformation reflected a self-conception of Owenites as participating in, and continuing the legacy of, a movement of religious reform. As a means, it demonstrated how new beliefs and understandings could peacefully triumph and how previously entrenched social institutions could be re-made, how searching critique could lead to the transformation of society. The Reformation was also attractive in proving the possibility of religious change, in which reason was increasingly central as a mechanism to understand God's nature and intentions and in which an arcane, ritualistic predecessor was supplanted by a more rational, truer form of religion. Further, as an historical process which was widely celebrated and aligned with British national identity, identifying parallels with the Reformation conferred legitimation upon socialism.

5.2.2 Rivals to Socialism

There are different reasons why one might identify a group, proposal, movement, idea as an alternative or rival. One might be pursuing a common objective, seeking to attract the same constituency of followers, competing for scarce resources of attention, or offering mutually contradictory analyses of the same problem. Each suggests an understanding of a basic commonality, that one faces a shared challenge or appeals to the same prospective adherents, as well as the existence of competition. The selection of one's rivals is therefore revealing because it expresses one's understanding of those alternatives which must be repelled, overcome, or weakened. In Section 5.2.2, I will explain how one Owenite selection of rivals and alternatives reveals their conception of the nature of their own movement. It reveals their understanding of socialism as sharing as many parallels with political attempts to reform the legal order as it does with religious attempts to transform the social world. Many Owenites identify Mormon missionaries, Methodists, and those seeking to revive traditionalism with the Anglican Church as their rivals just as they identify advocates for emigration, for repeal of the Anglo-Irish Union, or for the extension of suffrage. In identifying these as their rivals, they express

a conception of socialism as concerned as much with reconceiving and re-making religion as with social or economic reorganisation.

Owenites frequently note the existence of competing proposals to address social problems. When an author in the *Co-operative Miscellany* lists the unsuccessful alternatives to socialism, which offer competing accounts of the causes of, and solutions to, social distress, they identify Malthusian population theory with its recommendations to delay marriage, Attwood's currency reform, the repeal of the Corn Laws, the achievement of political reform to extend the suffrage and institute annual elections. They also include Richard Carlile's 'antichristian school' as an alternative to co-operation.[64] Such lists of prospective solutions reflect some of the political controversies which roiled the early nineteenth century. They include accounts of social problems as caused by an excess of population and therefore as requiring that labourers emigrate or that the birth rate be reduced, or as caused by the constraints on 'free trade' which require the repeal of the Corn Laws, or by the alleviation of the excess burdens of taxation which stifled economic activity. When X.W. notes the alternative to socialism, she notes the repeal of the Corn Laws, the calls for emigration, and the reduction of taxation.[65] Yet, these are note the only alternatives. A June 1843 editorial in the *New Moral World* notes as the rivals to Owenites not only the Anti-Corn Law League, which sought to lift the ban on imports of corn which was increasing domestic prices, but also the Oxford Movement, which sought to restore lost ritual to the Anglican Church. The editorial notes that although some 'think of Anti-Corn-Lawism and Puseyism as *the only* potent, economical, and moral influences of the age', it will soon be recognised that the 'Rationalists' are on 'an equality with these wealthy and influential parties'.[66] A subsequent article complains that the 'Puseyites' claim to address social problems, but their response is inadequate, consisting only of calls for greater subordination to the church and increased charity.[67] While the claim is that Owenite socialists (or 'Rationalists' as they were sometimes called) are as 'potent' an influence as the campaign for the Repeal of the Corn Laws or for increasing traditionalism within the Church

[64] *The Co-operative Miscellany* no.1, 1, 'Historical Remarks on Co-operative Societies' (January 1830), 6.
[65] Crisis no.3, 30, 'Combination the Only Hope of the Working Classes' – X.W. (22 March 1834), 247; See, also, *NMW* no.8, 24, 'Discussions on the Corn Laws' (12 December 1840), 377; *NMW* no.3, 123, 'National Support for the Poor' (4 March 1837), 148; Economist 2:38; *NMW* no.5, 3, 'Emigration' (10 November 1838), 33; *NMW* no.8, 18, 'The Emigration Swindle' – A Co-operator (31 October 1840), 278.
[66] *NMW* no.11, 50, 'Thoughts on the Times' (10 June 1843), 413.
[67] *NMW* no.12, 24, 'Revolutionary Doctrines' (9 December 1843), 188.

of England, the implication is that socialism is a comparable *kind* of influence as these attempts at legal and cultural change. Owenism is presented as in some way paralleling these two 'wealthy and influential' parties.

On other occasions, Owenites admiringly note the effective and well-developed institutions of certain religious groups. In so doing, they recognise that many religious reformers were pursuing a similar undertaking, and that their organisational structures were well-attuned to Owenite goals. The Methodists, for example, were celebrated for their efficient decision-making processes, reliable mechanisms to prevent fissiparous separatism, and effective fundraising for the construction of chapels.[68] The Scottish Kirk, meanwhile, was recognised as the model which the Association of All Classes of All Nations should follow.[69] Identification of the ways in which the Kirk and Methodists included institutions which were well-suited to Owenite ambitions also reflects a recognition of their shared challenges: of how to sustain ideological orthodoxy and coherence, or how to convert enthusiasm into financial support. Many Owenites understand themselves to need the same tools, and to pursue the same kind of task, as both religious and political reformers.

When Robert Owen describes the available alternatives to socialism, he asks

> What good, in the name of common sense, could be effected by the Tories, the Whigs, the Anti-Corn-Law League, the Universal Suffragists, the Chartists, the Church Party, the Dissenters, the Currency Party, the advocates for Emigration, or for the extension of popular Charities, so called; or for Education, connected and under the influence of some sectarian creed, dogmas, and doctrines; or through the extension of that most disputed of all words – religion.[70]

In so doing, Owen lists alike those who suggest emigration or Chartism as the solution to social problems with those who promote Disestablishment or who seek to restore ritual and tradition to the Anglican Church. Others claim that socialism can appeal to different competing factions, offering

[68] *NMW* no.4, 205, 'Plan for Erecting Social Institutions' – The Pilot (29 September 1838), 398; *NMW* no.4, 191, 'Joint Stock Company for Erecting Social Institutions' (23 June 1838), 277.
[69] *NMW* no.5, 23, 'Suggestions for the Amendment of the Laws…' – W. Newall (30 March 1839), 365.
[70] *NMW* no.12, 35, 'The President's Address' – Robert Owen (24 February 1844), 276.

order to Puseyites, free trade to the Anti-Corn Law League, and means of establishing substantial equality and protecting rights to the Chartists.[71] An address by the Central Board in the *New Moral World* in June 1843 notes that the alternatives to socialism are the repeal of the Corn Laws, the repeal of the Union between Britain and Ireland, and the 'increase of the influences of religion, to render man in some manner more worthy to receive the favour and protection of the great creating Power of the universe'.[72] These alternatives to socialism are a legal change to remove tariffs, a constitutional change in governance, and attempts to extend the influence of religion. In an 1837 article, 'D.' rebuffs the challenge that socialism abrogates the people's right to the soil, arguing that in contrast to the assertions of individual rights offered by Radicals or Dissenters, the Social System is a 'universal response'.[73]

On other occasions, the focus is less upon the relative merits of the proposals suggested by the rivals to Owenism than upon the direct competition for adherents. These reflect an understanding that socialists were contending against churches as much as they were against Chartists. In January 1840, the Failsworth Branch of the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists report to the New Moral World their excitement about the arrival in the town of a sect calling themselves the 'latter-day Saints' (i.e. the Mormons), and describe how one of their number, named 'Connard', has been lecturing against the Mormons.[74] 'An Owenian' writes to announce that, as a former Methodist, she would not exchange her newly-found socialist religion of charity for any religion of faith, counterposing socialism as a subject of commitment and a source of virtue against Methodism.[75] John Goodwyn Barmby reflects an appreciation of Owenism as a parallel to Christian organisations when he argues that if socialists don't act immediately then they will dwindle away like 'Quakers, Wesleyans, and Unitarians'.[76]

When many socialists note the analyses, proposals, and groups with whom they were competing, they reflect an understanding of their own project. Their selection of rivals identities those with whom they

[71] *NMW* no.13, 1, 'The Breaking-up of Parties' (29 June 1844), 5.
[72] *NMW* no.11, 52, 'Central Board Address' (17 June 1843) 432.
[73] *NMW* no.3, 115, 'Right to the Land' – D. (7 January 1837), 84.
[74] This is likely George Connard, who had served as secretary of the Oldham NCSRR branch and as social missionary in Wigan, and who been imprisoned in 1839 for refusing to take a religious oath. *NMW* no.7, 64, 'Progress of Social Reform – Failsworth' (11 January 1840), 1020; Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 185.
[75] *NMW* no.3, 142, 'Correspondence' – 'An Owenian' (15 July 1837), 310.
[76] *NMW* no.8, 21, 'Governmental Theories' – J. Goodwyn Barmby (21 November 1840), 326.

were contending to win adherents, or those who were also offering a solution to the same social problems.

In Section 5.2, I have argued that many Owenites present examples of religious reform as demonstrating the possibility of the kind of social change and identify religious reformers such as the Tractarians or Methodists as offering an alternative to socialism. I have argued that this suggests that many Owenites understood their own socialism as a project of religious reform.

5.3 Objection

In Section 5.3, I suggest and then reject an objection to this argument. One might respond that the argument of the previous section simply reflects the typical understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in early nineteenth-century Britain. This response would hold that the Owenite identification of rivals and of relevant events did not reflect these socialists' distinctive vision. Such an understanding would not be a product of their socialism, but would simply embody the common sense of their historical moment. In this section, I identify two reasons why one might argue that the Owenite identification of their rivals and of relevant events simply reproduces the expectations of their own context. The first concerns the distribution of responsibility for social functions, with the Church and other religious organisations perceived to be responsible for the provision of education and social support. The second concerns the perceived relevance of religious considerations to seemingly 'political' questions about legitimacy, obligation, or equality. In each case, of the responsibilities of religious institutions and of the relevance of religious considerations, the argument is that the Owenite understandings described in the previous section simply reproduce the conventional wisdom of their own context.

First, these Owenites might conceive religious movements and events to be relevant to their socialism because religious institutions were widely conceived to be responsible for the performance of certain social functions. For example, the Church had significant responsibility for education and for the provision of welfare. And it is in virtue of its failure to adequately fulfil its responsibilities in these

areas that Owenites often criticise their Church. Frequently, their discussions of religion include a focus upon the Church's failure to provide basic services, to feed, house, and educate the population, a criticism predicated upon the pastoral responsibility of the Church. For example, John Finch excoriates the clergy for acting

> in defiance of the spirit of Christianity, whilst millions of Christ's poor brethren are deprived of national education, confined and starved in workhouse prisons, in England, or naked, covered with rags, living in huts that would disgrace Hottentots, and feeding on seaweed and potatoes, in Ireland; millions of copies of the letter of Christianity are printed and circulated, at an enormous expense, in these and every other country in the world. Scribes, Pharisees, Hypocrites! the poor asked you for bread, you have given them bastilles of stone; they asked for a fish, they asked for knowledge, and you have given them the serpent of religious contention.[77]

It is the duty of the Church to ensure that 'Christ's poor brethren' have knowledge, food, and housing, and they are liable to criticism for their failure to honour this duty. These Owenite arguments, which focus upon the social role of the Church with regards to education or the wellbeing of the poor, suggest that Owenite interest in religious questions is attributable to the perceived distribution of responsibility of the Church for many of the movement's social concerns. With the subsequent waning of the Church's influence over social policy, one would therefore expect a correlative decline in socialist interest in religious questions.

Second, this Owenite conception of the relevance of religious movements and events might reflect that this was a context in which theological arguments were understood to have broader bearing, including in the litigation of seemingly 'political' questions. Debates about social rights or the duties of the state to provide for public welfare included arguments about God's intentions for population growth or about the implications of human stewardship over a divinely-created world.[78] Questions of obligation and political authority were discussed in terms dripping with Christian images and

[77] *NMW* no.3, 3, 'Foolery of Sectarianism – Part II Letter II' – John Finch (10 June 1837), 361.
[78] Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, 81–83.

arguments, and sermons frequently condemned political agitation by proving the analogy between God's rule and that of the temporal government. [79] Chartists, meanwhile, demanded the extension of political rights and the establishment of annual parliaments by appealing to the example of Jesus Christ and invoking scriptural arguments.[80] In such a context, in which religious considerations were broadly recognised as relevant to a range of political questions, it would be unsurprising that socialists understood religious reformers as their rivals and religious change as relevant to their goals.

However, the argument of this chapter is not that these Owenites understand religion to serve as a source of evaluative standards, moral authority, and social identity for participants in politics. Nor is the Owenite engagement with religious institutions limited only to their performance of social functions (although that is certainly part of their critique). Instead, the argument of this chapter concerns the project of socialism itself, and the ways in which religious change was perceived to offer the relevant context and an encouraging precursor, and those pursuing religious reform were perceived to be contemporary rivals for socialism. This is not a matter of the relevance of considerations or the distribution of social responsibilities, but of the nature of socialism itself, including the ways in which social transformation was to occur and the nature of that transformation. It reflects a self-conception of socialism as, to a significant degree, an enterprise of religious reform.

5.4 Religious Reform Essential to Socialism

In Section 5.2, I showed how many socialists understood themselves as pursuing a project of religious reform. I argued that these socialists understand religious events as heralding and creating opportunities for the establishment of socialism, identify the Reformation as a precedent for the kind and degree of change they seek, and understand movements for religious reforms as rivals pursuing similar goals or with comparable means.

[79] Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*.
[80] Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist Struggle 1838-1842'.

In Section 5.4, I argue that, for these Owenites, their project of religious reform is central to their conception of socialism: their religious critique is grounded in socialist reasons, they perceive false religion as an obstacle to the establishment of socialism, and they understand socialism as providing the conditions for true religion to flourish.

In Section 5.4.1, I will demonstrate how this Owenite critique of religion was grounded in socialist reasons. It therefore cannot be detached from the other activities of the movement whether as an eccentric distraction or as merely instrumental. Instead, these Owenites bring to bear consistent considerations on their understanding of religion. It is this which shows that they are offering a *socialist* account of religion. This contrasts with the scholarly interpretations described in Section 5.1 of the Owenite engagement with religion as eccentric, as the residuum of a previous tradition, or as merely instrumental to their true goals.

In Section 5.4.2, I show how, for these Owenites, false theology offers an obstacle to socialism because it encourages rancorous divisions which prevent the recognition of common humanity and the promotion of social solidarity. The successful operation of socialist communities depends upon the establishment of the true religion.

In Section 5.4.3, I note how these Owenites understand socialism as enabling the victory of true religion by providing the preconditions for the widespread practice of religious virtue. This further demonstrates the centrality of religious reform to the establishment of socialism, by showing how the increasing dissemination of religious virtue was understood as a key attraction of the socialist future.

5.4.1 Religious Critique Grounded in Socialism

In Section 5.4.1, I argue that the Owenite critique of religion is a *socialist* critique in the sense that it is grounded in, and expresses, their fundamental socialist commitments.It exemplifies their distinctively socialist analysis of societal problems as causes by erroneous beliefs, as stemming from a basic ignorance which causes social division and which is reparable with the application of a single truth. This is an analysis which reflects their belief in the natural harmony of human interests, a harmony

obscured only by pernicious and artificial divisions, in the natural inclination towards cooperation, and in the availability of rational solutions to social problems. In virtue of the availability of such rational solutions and of an incipient harmony of interests, it is only ignorance which offers an impediment, so that when the truth is revealed, consensus will swiftly and inevitably follow. Disagreement is therefore a symptom of the fact that all parties are in error, and will cease when rational solution is found. Further, complexity is often a superficial cloak for a simple, rational truth, and is to be explained by deliberate mystification. These understandings about the source and solubility of social problems were present in the Owenite analysis of religion, including the belief in a single, rationally accessible truth, in disagreement as reflecting ignorance and obscuring the natural compatibility of interests. Owenite suspicions about the ways in which the motivation of individual profit could generate socially harmful perverse incentives and about the existence of professional classes performing specialist functions, both recurrent features of Owenite social analysis, were found also in their analysis of the clergy. Owenite analysis of religion is a distinctively *socialist* analysis because it is philosophically grounded in and integrated with their conception of the world. In this sub-section, I identify these features of the Owenite analysis of religious problems and note how they recur also in the Owenite analysis of the nature of politics. I then show that the Owenite analysis of the priesthood manifests the same features as their account of, for example, doctors or lawyers. In both instances I do so in order to illustrate how the Owenite analysis of religion is grounded in their basic socialist commitments.

In his 1837 pamphlet *A Defence of the Social Principles*, C.J. Haslam argues that ignorance causes, and knowledge can resolve, divisive disagreements over religious questions. Haslam identifies this damaging ignorance as the widespread misconception that people are responsible for the formation of their own characters and therefore responsible for their actions. As Haslam asks,

> What occasions all the quarrels between man and man, between husband and wife, and parents and children? The belief of man's responsibility. What occasions all the quarrels

> between Whigs, Tories, & Radicals, and all the religious sects & parties in the world? The belief of man's responsibility.[81]

Religious controversy flows not from disagreement as such, but rather from the misconceived belief that others could have acted differently, or could ever act differently. Recognising the truth of non-responsibility does not lead to convergence on the same ideas, but instead prevents disagreements from being contentious. As Haslam asks, 'How can a man be angry with another, when he knows that that other cannot help thinking and feeling as he does?'.[82] The solution to animosity is to endorse an empirical claim about responsibility, which serves as the rational grounding for an attitude of tolerance. By endorsing such a claim, Haslam maintains, one comes to act with charity towards others. In an 1835 lecture on 'Human Nature' at the AACAN's Charlotte Street Institution, 'Mr. Alger' explains how society is deeply divided between 'religionists', who falsely believe themselves fallen and degraded, and 'sceptics', who merely doubt and lack an understanding of how to arrive at truth. This division, Alger explains, is grounded in an ignorance which can be dissipated by the adoption of the fundamental principles of human nature and rational society.[83]

This reflects a form of social analysis which was widely applied by Owenites. In a lecture on 'The Principles of Government', G. Simkins identifies a basic ignorance as the cause of all the errors of government and of religion. Simkins argues that all governments have been established on the foundation of three errors: that humans are innately bad, that individuals form their own characters, and that private property is the foundation of public prosperity. All religions are similarly grounded in error, particularly the errant and immoral belief in the corrupt nature of humans and the world, a belief which 'debase[s] the Being whom they pretend to exalt, by supposing him to be the author of imperfection'. Both government and religion are grounded in an erroneous understanding of human nature.[84] In 1834, 'The Friends of the Human Race' attributes the exclusive measures of class, sect,

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[81] Haslam, *A Defence of the Social Principles, Delivered in the Social Institution, Salford*, 8.
[82] Haslam, 7.
[83] *NMW* no.2, 60, 'Association of All Classes of All Nations' (19 December 1835), 62.
[84] *NMW* no.2, 55, (14 November 1835), 21. This is likely the 'George Simkins' who was appointed to the London District Board at the 1839 Congress of the AACAN and served as Secretary of the London Co-operative Building Society. NMW no.5, 57, 'To the Shareholders of the London Co-operative Society' - George Simkins (16 November 1839), 896; Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists, *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress...*, 136.

and party not ultimately to selfishness or avarice, but to ignorance.[85] These measures are grounded in an incomplete understanding of self-interest and of the social good, in a failure to understand the fact of shared human interests. On such an account, sect and party are related to a failure to comprehend the common good.

This same analysis is used when the rancorous division of French politics is attributed to basic, irrational error. An 1839 article in the *New Moral World* identifies the contrast between political ideas, about which there is fierce disagreement, and a subject like astronomy, about which there is broad consensus. However, the author argues, this consensus was relatively new and had emerged only when astronomy had become formalised into a science of the study of celestial bodies. Prior to this formalisation, there had been the wild speculations of astrology and therefore significant dissensus.[86] Political disagreements are akin to these disagreements about astrology; they are the product of ignorance and will be solved when the application of scientific methods allows the true answers to be discovered. This suggests that disagreement within politics is not a 'reasonable disagreement' which flows from the 'burdens of judgement' and reflects different weightings of values in our evaluations of evidence. Instead, disagreement is the product of ignorance. This is an ignorance which lies at the foundation of all politics, with damaging consequences; '[f]rom the king and president, to the meanest citizen and starving pauper, all are suffering by the political ignorance, and consequent mischievous, unjust, and cruel measures which this ignorance daily engenders'.[87]

James Elishama Smith similarly identifies the problems of religion and politics as flowing from ignorance of the correct answers, and argues that there does exist a method to discover those answers. Smith describes a 'science of analogy':

> a science which is as real as the science of botany, geology, or any other of the sciences – a science never discovered till now, and destined, in a very short time, to astonish the world by the splendour of its discoveries. It is a science which embraces all nature, and demonstrates, by lines, by numbers, and mathematical diagrams, that throughout all nature, both physical

[85] *NMW* no.1, 2, The Friends of the Human Race (8 November 1834), 9-10.
[86] *NMW* no.6, 59, 'Selections from the Breaking-Up of Politics in France – Paris: 1836' (7 December 1839), 931.
[87] *NMW* no.1, 15, 'New Moral World' (7 February 1835), 115.

> and intellectual, in politics, in religion, and in all the sciences, a uniform, systematic arrangement takes place; that there is meaning and utility in all that is past; and that all this complicated machinery of mystery, fanaticism, and tyranny, shall bring forth good fruit.[88]

While the idea of a 'science of analogy' was not widely promoted among Owenites, it was nonetheless an idea which resonated with common Owenite expectations and preconceptions about the possible existence of a single, ordered account of the world. It was argued that a 'uniform, systematic arrangement' in 'politics, in religion' could be demonstrated 'by lines, by numbers, and mathematical diagrams'. It is imagined that the application of the 'science of analogy' can 'astonish the world by the splendour of its discoveries' in politics and religion, bringing 'forth good fruit' from what had previously been a 'complicated machinery of mystery, fanaticism, and tyranny'. The lack of knowledge about the science of analogy had allowed the emergence of the unnecessary complexities of political oppression and religious enthusiasm. Just as with the account of the source of conflict in French politics, this article in the *Crisis* identifies political and religious maladies as flowing from an absence of knowledge, and as soluble by socialism.

Often the Owenite analysis of the clergy reflects the same arguments which they apply to other professions. They are identifying as existing only because of, and having an incentive to sustain, irrational social organisation. They are a professional cadre who have appropriated a particular social function which belongs to the society as a whole, and whose individual interests clash with the broader social good. Perverse economic incentives lead them to perform a deleterious social role: doctors profited from the continuation of disease, lawyers gained by prolonging legal disputes, priests benefitted through denominational and doctrinal disagreement, and politicians prospered by stoking division. Priests were comparable to the merchants who inserted themselves into economic relations, disrupting straightforward processes of production and consumption, or political entrepreneurs who cultivated division with bewitching rhetoric and abstruse philosophies. Each introduced complexity

[88] *Crisis* no.3, 3, 'Weekly Proceedings – Institution, Charlotte Street' (21 September 1833), 17. This account of a 'science of analogy' is likely borrowed from Charles Fourier, who argued that there existed correspondences between the natural and social world, with each facet of the human soul represented in nature by a different colour, shape, and material (friendship corresponded to purple, circle, and iron). Beecher, *Charles Fourier*, 341–49.

into simple and transparent social relations, doing so because this brought them an apparent economic benefit.

According to an 1838 article on 'The Clergy Brought to the Bar', priests, lawyers, doctors, and soldiers are all alike. Each requires, and is therefore incentivised to sustain, socially harmful phenomena. Any attempt to prevent illness, dispel superstition, and placate disagreement will fail while there exist groups who have an interest in obstructing these efforts:

> While superstition exists, men will be priests; they co-exist as surely and necessarily as litigation and lawyers, sickness and physicians, contention and soldiers; as surely as that while poisonous drinks are craved for, men will be found to vent them…When physicians are idle, will they not talk and write up sickness and themselves? Will not slack lawyers encourage litigiousness? So also will priests write and preach up superstition; and in this they act on the same principle with spirit dealers, who, when their trade flags, take means to create a sensation, in order to DRAW MORE.[89]

These professional groups, including priests, will sustain social problems because they have an interest in their endurance. Others are more confident that these groups can be abolished, with 'A Rational Religionist' arguing that priests and lawyers will become redundant when socialism banishes superstition and institutes shared property.[90] Similarly, the *New Moral World* prints a letter sent by members of the White Quakers which describes how the group live together without private property and without these professional classes.[91] Their functions are performed not by a dedicated class but by the community as a whole; there is 'no physician needed, no lawyer, no priest, no soldier; [with] Jesus Christ himself exercising all those offices through his members in the church'.[92] The White Quakers illustrate, for Owenites, how the existence of separate classes of priests or physicians reflects

[89] *NMW* no.4, 208, 'The Clergy Brought to the Bar' (20 October 1838), 417.
[90] *NMW* no.7, 77, 'The True Christianity' – A Rational Religionist (11 April 1840), 1231.
[91] The White Quakers were a schismatic Irish group who had broken away from the wider Society of Friends. They maintained that religious truth flowed only from the 'Inner Light' and not from scripture, rejected worldly goods, and wore only undyed clothes (which earned them their name). They were celebrated by John Goodwyn Barmby and some members of the Ham Common Concordium as heralding a forthcoming social regeneration. After forming around 1840, they dissolved roughly fifteen years later. Gregory, "'Some Account of the Progress of the Truth as It Is in Jesus'".
[92] *NMW* no.13, 8, 'The White Quakers' – Joshua Jacob and Abigail Beale (24 August 1844), 67.

social irrationality and therefore will be abolished by the establishment of a community. Socialism will bring about the redundancy of the clergy, whose functions will be returned to the wider community. After all, '[i]f all persons were well educated, physically, intellectually, and morally, what need would mankind have of priests?'.[93] As James Elishama Smith declares, '[l]et every man be his own priest, for as long as religion is a trade the world will be overrun with hypocrites'.[94]

The same arguments are found in application to doctors and teachers. John Goodwyn Barmby explains that the existing logic of the medical profession means that the interests of doctors, surgeons, and dentists clash with the interests of the remainder of society. Barmby argues that, at present, doctors are paid only for the treatment of illness, and so have an interest in the continuation of illness and in the failure of attempts at prevention. This irrationality can be repaired by aligning these interests, constituting society as akin to a life assurance company, in which there is a common interest in the prevention of disease.[95] The same argument is offered by T.W.M. in *The Working Bee*. T.W.M. explains that when doctors are employed by the army they are no longer remunerated for dispensing treatments, and so because they do not profit for illness, are incentivised to prevent disease. The same principle applies, T.W.M. argues, to teachers, who should be employed by the government so as to ensure that their interests align with those of the wider community.[96]

5.4.2 False Religion an Obstacle to Socialism

In Section 5.4.2, I maintain that religious reform is central to these Owenites' understanding of their socialism in the sense that they perceive religious falsehood as an obstacle to the success of socialism. Owenites often identify the existing religious situation as an obstacle to socialism, because disagreement between different religious groups encourages division and distracts from the existence of a common good. An erroneous theology both leads to social division and causes that division to be

[93] *Working Bee* no.1, 2, 'Reasons for Espousing the Social Principles' – J.J. (20 June 1840), 20.
[94] Smith, *The Antichrist, or, Christianity Reformed*, 78.
[95] *NMW* no.9, 13, 'Societarian Views on the Medical…- Chap I' – John Goodwyn Barmby (27 March 1841), 187; *NMW* no.9, 16, 'Societarian Views on the Medical…- Chap II' – John Goodwyn Barmby (17 April 1841), 235.
[96] *Working Bee* no.1, 26, 'Mis-Government' – T.W.M. (28 November 1840), 203.

particularly acrimonious and marked by violent intolerance. It therefore impedes the recognition of common humanity, obstructing the adoption of a socialist ethos, and barring the successful operation of a socialist community. Petty, irresolvable wrangles and endless theological disputes divert from the shared identity of all as humans. By erecting barriers of difference, such disputes are antithetical to the success of socialism, which requires mutual identification and social solidarity. In a context of religious dissensus and division, the thick ethical bonds of trust and mutuality required for the success of socialism are simply impossible. Socialism requires a solution to the problem of a world divided between 'sects', a problem which stems from theological errors such as the belief in supernatural events. As an author in the *New Moral World* comments:

> We get from miracles, and the association which miracles generate of the ideas of authority, duty, sin, reward and punishment, with belief and unbelief – we get from these the eternal dividing and classifying of men by their opinions.[97]

While socialists seek 'the *universal* benefit of mankind', the 'happiness of the whole human family', and 'unbounded fraternity', those divided between contending sects aim only at partial benefit, pursuing only the good of their own denomination.[98] According to an 1843 article welcoming the release of factory reformer Richard Oastler from prison, 'the petty distinctions of political party and religious creed are hindrances to the development of our common humanity in its best and most exalted respects'.[99] In his June 1835 Sunday evening lecture at the Charlotte Street Institution, 'Mr. Jenneson' agrees that sectarian divisions threaten the success of socialism, and argues that that the project of human improvement requires that alliances must be formed with those 'who have been able to shake off the shackles of sect and party' and who have declared 'adherence to those divine truths, on which is founded the religion of charity'.[100] While the 'sect' offers an impediment to mutual identification and cooperation, the 'religion of charity' offers the foundation of socialist solidarity. According to 'A Student in Realities', arguing in the lead article in the *New Moral World*, 'civil and religious discordances…tend more to retard and impede social reforms than they are productive of good', and

[97] *NMW* no.10, 17, 'Religion As It Has Been, And As It Must Be' (12 February 1842), 258.
[98] *NMW* no.5, 32, 'Progress of Social Reform: Leicester' – W.P. Throsby (1 June 1839), 506.
[99] *NMW* no.12, 25, 'Liberation of Mr. Oastler' (16 December 1843), 199.
[100] *NMW* no.1, 136, 'Association of All Classes of All Nations' (4 July 1835), 281.

these discordances will be perpetuated if socialists 'tolerate longer the kneeling down to stationary doctrines, and the listening to senseless words'.[101] At present religion 'separates a man from his fellows, which produces feelings of estrangement and antipathy among beings of the same nature', and hinders the prospect of socialist communities succeeding because '[u]nity of principle and unity of practice, are essential to the success of such establishments'. Although 'it is not to be expected that the deep-seated prejudices, hereditary and acquired, transmitted through long ages of error, are to be eradicated in a single generation. All we hope for is the removal of their exciting causes, certain, that if this be done, they will, in due time, die a natural death'.[102]

Religious error is not merely the reason for the proliferation of sects. It is also the reason why the relationship between those sects is so hostile. Priests teach that those 'persecuting or butchering heretics or infidels' will be rewarded in a future life.[103] On H.L.'s account, it is impossible to achieve 'uniformity of opinion on speculative subjects', especially given the 'medley character of the writings upon which the various sects ground their opinions', but the reason why persecution is so common and religious interactions so hostile is the 'great criminality attached to false religion in those writings'.[104] Existing religions present heterodoxy as deserving damnation and encourage adherents to harass dissenters. This problem is further exacerbated by the existence of a group who benefit from the continuation of religious falsehoods and so denounce those who apply their own reason to religious questions as blasphemers.[105] In virtue of their dependence upon the religious error, the clergy persecute those who might reveal the truth. These religious errors nurture animosity, obstruct the development of social bonds, and therefore offer an obstacle to socialism. Such errors also encourage wrongdoing. As James Elishama Smith argues, the threats of eternal damnation issued by existing religions succeed only in promoting immorality, and there obstructing the successful operation of prospective socialist communities. These threats only undermine the authority of moral standards because they imply that innocent children will be condemned to suffer in hell. And, Smith suggests, who would obey the moral edicts of a being who was content to witness the suffering of blameless

[101] *NMW* no.4, 207, 'To the Calumniators of Socialism - 'A Student in Realities' (13 October 1838), 409.
[102] *NMW* no.9, 13, 'Christian Socialists in America' (27 March 1841), 194.
[103] *NMW* no.7, 88, 'The Critic Criticised Article IV' (27 June 1840), 1340.
[104] *NMW* no.8, 9, 'Rationale of Theological Persecution' – H.L. (22 August 1840), 122.
[105] *NMW* no.8, 26, 'Cheap *Versus* Dear Blasphemy' (26 December 1840), 409.

children?[106] An erroneous theology which issues warnings about hellfire serves only to erode moral standards and therefore to obstruct socialism.

The degree to which religious falsehoods obstruct to the establishment of socialism further highlights the centrality of the Owenite account of religion described in Chapter 2. On this account, the true religion cultivates solidarity, encourages moral behaviour, and encourages each to identify with the interests of others. While people continue to belabour under their theological falsehoods, social division, persecution, and animosity will endure, and socialist communities would fail. Without dispelling such falsehoods with a true account of religion, Owenites understand that socialism cannot succeed.

5.4.3 Socialism and True Religion

In Section 5.4.2, I noted how socialism can be achieved only when religious error has been extinguished by truth. In this Section (5.4.3.), I will note that the establishment of socialism also creates the preconditions for religious virtue, sustaining and encouraging the adoption of a true account of religion. This demonstrates the existence of a mutually supporting relationship between religious truth and the establishment of socialism. Just as the overcoming of false religion removes an obstacle to the success of socialist communities, so also the establishment of socialism creates a nurturing environment which makes it easier to act with religious virtue. Further, the fact that socialism offers the material preconditions for religious virtue and for the flourishing of true religion is a considerable attraction. Socialism encourages and enables the triumph of the true account of religion, and the fact that it does is an important merit of socialism and a reason to endorse socialism.

In the opening article in an 1841 edition of the *New Moral World,* 'A Missionary' notes that all 'are now divided, and striving with each other on account of religious differences'. Although these religions each teach that all should act with charity and love, they also encourage all to violate these teachings. The way to repair this hypocrisy and to heal religious division is with 'the crowning principles of

[106] Smith, *The Antichrist, or, Christianity Reformed*, 9–10.

community of property, and liberty of conscience'. It is by assuring that all 'have equal right to express whatever shall appear to them to be true, and worship God in any form whatever: not interfering with equal right in others; and using only argument and persuasion in making converts to their peculiar creeds'.[107] As a lecture on 'The Millennium' announces, the establishment of communities can 'redeem' humans who are currently misshapen by social institutions, whose moral character has been degraded by irrational society. At present, the lecture argues, institutions of private property and religion encourage a 'warfare of estranged feelings and interests' which is incompatible with socialism. However, community of property and the equal distribution of wealth offer the foundation for the social arrangements of the Millennium, repairing social division and 'redeem[ing]' humanity.[108] By founding 'co-operative communities', religious contention can be brought to an end.[109] It was not only the establishment of communities which would nurture religious virtue, but also the organisation of moral and scientific education. By establishing 'a new education of all the human faculties,…man may be regenerated, or fitted to receive the religion of charity, to act upon it in every thought, word, and deed'.[110]

It is even argued that the clergy should recognise that if their goal is the promotion of religious piety, then they should abandon their preaching and encourage the establishment of socialist communities. In his 'Community: A Vision', Reverend Joseph Marriott depicts a community in which a minister has joined because he accepts that his preaching was inadequate to achieve his goal. Instead, the minister understood, religious virtue could be promoted only when social structures were transformed and socialism established.[111] Similarly, when facing the suggestion that careful study of scripture offers the solution to greed and avarice, a writer in the *New Moral World* responds that the 'preaching of the Gospel to a world of competitors, is like pouring the Jordan into the Dead Sea'.[112] The existing Christian institutions and Christian moral code have proven themselves incapable of producing virtue and preventing vice; Christianity has been shown to be 'quite impotent to prevent' all manner of

[107] *NMW* no.9, 7, 'Short Essays on Socialism VII' – 'A Missionary' (13 February 1841), 91.
[108] *NMW* no.2, 56, 'The Millennium' (21 November 1835), 29.
[109] *NMW* no.9, 13, 'Co-operative Colony at Ralahine' – John Finch (27 March 1841), 193.
[110] *NMW* no.1, 29, 'The New Moral World' (16 May 1835), 232.
[111] Marriott's play was serialised in the *New Moral World* in 1837 in *NMW* no.3, 138 (17 June 1837), 277-9 - NMW, no.3, 155, (14 October 1837), 416.
[112] *NMW* no.3, 144, 'The Lust of Wealth' (29 July 1837), 324.

iniquity, at home and abroad.[113] By contrast, as James Elishama Smith announces at an 1834 lecture at the Charlotte Street Institution, 'our system of socialism would be an everlasting sermon – a real practical sermon'.[114] Socialism offers the appropriate, practical means to spread religious virtue, in contrast with the inefficacy of scriptural study or evangelisation.

In contrast with the impotence of the attempts of Christians to promote religion, socialists provide adherents with an understanding of their own nature and furnish the necessary motivations so that all can follow ethical dicta. Socialism provides accurate information about human nature. It is noted that the 'Bible contains a revelation of God's will; it tells us what we ought to do. We now want Revelation the second, to tell us *how* we are to do what we ought to do'. And to find this second Revelation it will be necessary to 'study man's nature, for man is at least as much the work of God as the Bible is; and having done so, to form practical arrangements calculated to develop the physical, moral, and intellectual nature of every human being'.[115] Such practical arrangements offer an answer to the question of '*how* we are to do what we ought to do'. With a clear understanding of human nature, socialists can then work to promote the necessary motivations to encourage religious virtue. This includes replacing retributive punishment as a response to wrongdoing with 'correction – of moral remedy for moral disease', using the socialist understanding of character formation in order to promote moral behaviour.[116] According to John Finch, under Christianity, duties have been taught by commandment, so that people are simply told how to act but lack the motivations to do so. By contrast, under the system of charity and kindness in Owenite community, it comes be that 'man's duty is a reasonable service', with 'divine principles upon a firmer base, than any system that ever was taught to man'.[117] In the same way, a letter from Owenite John Kennedy to the Bishop of Ripon concurs with the prelate about the nature of religious duty, but argues that it needs to be made easier to follow these duties. They need to be connected to love and to inclination, giving Christians reasons

[113] *NMW* no.8, 2, 'American Christianity' – 'Amo' (11 July 1840), 22; Crisis no.1, 9 'New York: Morals of a Christian City' – New York Free Enquirer (26 May 1832), 35.
[114] *Crisis* no.3, 30 'Institution, Charlotte-Street' (22 March 1834), 241.
[115] *NMW* no.3, 141, 'True Christianity' – 'FJO' (8 July 1837), 298.
[116] *NMW* no.4, 193, 'The State and Prospects of Society Letter XVII – W.H.S. (7 July 1838), 290.
[117] *NMW* no.3, 155, 'Foolery of Sectarianism – Part II Letter IX' – John Finch (14 October 1837), 411; *NMW* no.7, 69, 'To the Members of the Universal Community Society…' – John Finch (15 February 1840), 1108

to follow these duties which connect to their affections and feelings.[118] Owenite reform alters social structures so that peoples' inclinations are aligned with their duties. According to Bowes, the 'difference between the religion of Socialism and every other religion is, that the religions that have preceded it have been preceptive religions; but they have never surrounded mankind with good circumstances'. In contrast, socialists offer 'deliverance from vicious habits – degrading practices – demoralizing poverty', and by doing so enable each to act virtuously.[119] According to the opening article in the *New Moral World* by a 'Christian', socialism provides the material preconditions for religious virtue, removing the incentives to act immorally, for example, abolishing the motivation to steal which is presented by relative poverty.[120] Originally benevolent Christian institutions had failed because they were never combined with a system of cooperative productive industry, and therefore the 'mammon-spirit of self-aggrandisement and unholy domination entered the fold of Christ'.[121] Socialism repairs this failure and expels this corrupting spirit of avarice. As a 'Foe to Ambition' announces:

> Socialism expects no super-human virtue of mankind: it rather makes provision for human frailty by removing obstacles; it only expects what can be rendered consonant with the reason of all, and by proper training, the inclination of all. Under such circumstances we cannot see any room for the legitimate use of praise and blame.[122]

In Chapter 5, I have sought to demonstrate how the account of religion described in Chapter 3, and the sources of which were suggested in Chapter 4, relates to these Owenites' broader socialism. I identified three ways in which religious interests have been dismissed as un-socialist or unimportant: as reflecting a form of eccentricity, as an archaic barrier to the development of mature socialism, and as merely instrumental. I argued instead that many Owenites understand their socialism as a project of religious reform, which inherits the legacy of the Reformation and which competes against the

[118] NMW no.5, 30, 'The Bishop of Ripon and Socialism' – John Kennedy (18 May 1839), 476.
[119] *NMW* no.11, 37, 'Report of the Discussion on Socialism…' (11 March 1843), 294.
[120] *NMW* no.5, 2, 'Signs of the Times' – 'Christian' (3 November 1838), 17.
[121] *NMW* no.7, 74, 'On the Existence of Moral Evil…Essay XXIV' – X. (21 March 1840), 1180; *NMW* no.4, 193, 'The State and Prospects of Society Letter XVII – W.H.S. (7 July 1838), 290.
[122] *NMW* no.8, 21, 'Praise and Blame' – 'A Foe to Ambition' (21 November 1840), 326.

Tractarians or the Methodists. I then argued that, for these Owenites, the project of religious reform is central to their socialism: their religious critique is rooted in their socialist commitments, they argue that socialism can be established only when false religion is dispelled, and they maintain that the establishment of socialism will institute the material preconditions for the triumph of true religion.

Chapter 6: Religion and the History of Socialism

The previous chapters of this thesis have focused upon Owenite socialism. I have surveyed existing scholarly accounts of the Owenite engagement with religion. I then identified one prominent Owenite re-imagination of religion. I argued that this re-imagination can be understood only within the religious context of early nineteenth-century Britain, as a response to the prevailing theological climate, the conservatism of dominant religious institutions, and the prevalence of denominational conflict, and as drawing upon the currents of natural theology, deism, popular religion, and Rational Dissent. I then argued that, contrary to scholarly interpretations, many Owenites understand themselves to be undertaking a project of religious reform which was grounded in their socialist philosophy and essential to the achievement of their goals.

In Chapter 6, I identify a broader debate about the relationship between socialism and religion, a debate in which this thesis can be seen as an intervention. The ambition of this Chapter is to clarify this debate. I do so because this debate has often been burdened with confusion and equivocation, which offers an obstacle to considered reflection. The goal of this chapter is therefore limited: to offer a taxonomy of different accounts of the relationship between socialism and religion, and to disambiguate some different senses in which one might consider there to be such a relationship. This is intended to lay the foundations for an exploration of the way in which the argument of this thesis might bear upon a much wider debate, although I do not have the space here to undertake this exploration.

It is often suggested that socialism is a religion, or that commitment to socialism represents a faith.[1] Or that socialism is an attempt to 'supplant religion', seeking the 'supplanting or extending [of] Christianity', that socialism is 'the scientific replacement of traditional Christianity'.[2] Or, more obscurely, it might be that socialism is a 'quasi-religious phenomenon', is 'pseudo-Christian', or an emanation of the 'redemptive burst of passionate, even quasi-millenarian if pseudo-Christian

[1] Socialism is not unique in having been interpreted as having 'religious' qualities. Totalitarianism, fascism, and even liberalism have all been characterised in the same terms, for some similar and many dissimilar reasons. Gentile, 'Fascism as Political Religion'; Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion*; Voegelin, 'The Political Religions'.
[2] Muravchik, *Heaven on Earth*, 3; Claeys, 'Non-Marxian Socialism 1815-1914', 545; Stedman Jones, 'Introduction', 8fn2.

enthusiasm which burst forth in 1789'.[3] One might also want to differentiate between the '*formal* attempt to supplant Christianity and the *substantive* quasi-religious sentiment which often underpinned this'.[4] Alternatively, one might argue that the identification of socialism with religion is merely polemical, an 'attempt to dismiss its intellectual seriousness', implying that 'socialism is the result not of rational reflection but of a different kind of commitment'.[5] The allegation that socialism is akin to religion is one of 'the principal arguments of the anti-Communist arsenal; the idea, no doubt, is that it is shamefaced religion, a religion which does not wish to know its own name'.[6] Just as with the dispute over interpretations of Owenism outlined in Chapter 2, such discussions contain a range of competing perspectives, including those who argue that socialism is antipathetic to all religion, is itself a replacement for religion, and is inevitably grounded in Christian ethical traditions. Throughout this chapter, I refer to social*ism* rather than merely social*ists* in order to emphasise that the relationships being described are not merely what socialists happened to think or argue, independently of and alongside their socialism. Instead, these are relationships which are *philosophically grounded in* or *held in virtue of* socialism.

'Socialism' describes a rich and diverse tradition of thought and action, so it is implausible to suggest that there is a *single* relationship between socialism and religion. Instead, the goal of this section is to distinguish some different ways of thinking about this relationship. I note eight senses in which one might understand the relationship between socialism and religion: that socialism i) is philosophically opposed to religion, ii) is neutral on religious questions, iii) shares features with religion in virtue of the way in which socialists relate to their commitments or iv) in virtue of the way in which socialist organisations adopt customarily religious practices, that v) socialism is itself a religion or vi) a replacement for religion, that vii) socialism requires the establishment of a novel religion, and finally viii) that socialism is itself grounded in certain theological traditions. These accounts are not exclusive in two separate senses. First, they are not exclusive because some of these accounts refer to different facets of socialism. That is, socialism might be philosophically hostile to the truth and influence of

[3] Wolfe, *From Radicalism to Socialism*, 14; Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, 68; Claeys, 'Early Socialism as Intellectual History', 899.
[4] Claeys, 'Early Socialism as Intellectual History', 902.
[5] Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, 187.
[6] Bevir, 187; Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 114.

theological claims while also borrowing from customarily religious institutions and regarding socialism as offering a substitute for religion.[7] Second, they are not exclusive because many of the examples cited to illustrate these accounts do not claim to be offering the only true account of the relationship between socialism and religion. Instead, they make a narrower claim about one particular instance of socialism, and do not imply that this is true of other instances.

In distinguishing and illustrating these competing conceptions of the relationship between socialism and religion, I draw on both the self-understandings of socialists and the interpretations of historians. These two groups clearly offer different kinds of accounts. While socialists identify and present their own goals, arguments, and commitments, historians offer evaluations of the influences upon socialism and interpretations which might include the implicit or unrecognised. In some ways, this distinction approximates to that between an 'emic' and an 'etic' perspective. An 'emic' understanding is that of a 'insider' while an 'etic' is that of an 'outsider'.[8] While an 'emic' account might hold that the political culture of the Soviet Union was strictly anti-theistic, an 'etic' account might focus upon the existence of parallels with the iconography of the Russian Orthodox Church or upon the role that political institutions played in the lives of citizens. In some cases, such disagreement reflects that the 'emic' view of socialists is straightforwardly wrong. There is a difference, for example, between believing socialism to be neutral on religious questions and socialism *actually* being neutral on religious questions. In other cases, these represent different kinds of claim. Nonetheless, I treat them together because the goal of this chapter is to develop a single, relatively simple, taxonomy of the different ways of thinking about this relationship. I pursue this goal because the debate about the relationship between socialism and religion is so often confused and dogged by conflations between the different senses in which one might understand this relationship. It can be unclear whether or about what the participants disagree, and a single taxonomy allows one to identify where disagreements are merely terminological or conceptual and where they are genuinely substantive.

[7] There is also a question about *for whom* socialism enjoys such a relationship with religion. It might be the case, for example, that the adoption of customarily religious rites means that, for some, socialism is a replacement for religion, while for others this is a merely strategic decision to entice or mollify former believers.
[8] Fetterman, 'Emic/Etic Distinction', 249.

One further complexity in discussing these accounts is that apparent agreement about the relationship between socialism and religion can conceal significant dissensus about underlying conceptions of the nature of religion. In such instances, particularly where parallels are identified between socialism and religion, this can be more revealing about the author's conception of religion than their conception of socialism. For example, when Friedrich Engels notes the similarities between socialism and early Christianity, he observes that both were movements of the oppressed, who persevered despite persecution, urged followers to zealously propagandise and to struggle against their enemy, and also attracted some peripheral eccentrics.[9] Instead of portraying socialism as having spiritual or transcendent features, Engels' analogy identifies early Christianity as itself a worldly organisation pursuing concrete social and political goals. Such disagreements about the nature of religion do add some complexity to the task of clearly distinguishing ways of understanding the relationship. However, they also further demonstrate the importance of more clearly understanding what is intended by certain comparisons or analogies in order to identify where substantive disagreements lie.

As well as clarifying an ongoing debate about socialism and religion, this chapter also seeks to set the discussion of the previous chapters into a broader philosophical and intellectual context. This aids reflection on how discussion of Owenism might contribute to broader debates about socialism and religion, particularly in virtue of the depth of Owenite reflection upon the role of religion in socialism. It allows one to think about how re-consideration of Owenism might contribute to broader understanding of the history and philosophy of socialism.

The first conception of the relationship between socialism and religion considers socialism as necessarily, and philosophically, opposed to religion. This is not merely contingent hostility, with socialists happening also to be opposed to religion, but an understanding of religion as an obstacle to socialism's achievement. It is not merely that religion is false, but further that with the progress of socialism the origins and functions of religion will be exposed. This kind of view is most famously exemplified by Karl Marx's oft-quoted declaration in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* that '[r]eligion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the

[9] Engels, 'On the History of Early Christianity'.

soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people'.[10] Religion is the dream by an oppressed people of a better world, but as such a dream it is a distraction from the achievement of that goal and will (likely) be dispelled by the demystification which accompanies socialism.[11] For Ernest Belfort Bax, what it means to be a socialist is to be opposed to religion: socialism is manifested 'in economy as co-operative Communism; in religion as anti-theistic Humanism; and in politics as cosmopolitan Republicanism'.[12] Such an account of socialism as requiring and promoting the elimination of religion is understood to locate socialism within a rationalist Enlightenment project which sought to supplant traditional appeals to religious authority with science and reason. It can be seen to flower in the Soviet Union's determination to expel manifestations of the Russian Orthodox Church from public life or in Lenin's account of religion as. a form of 'spiritual oppression', rooted in economic oppression, which pacifies the discontent of believers whose faith arises from their impotence.[13] This basic mutual hostility might be limited only to an incompatibility between socialism and particular theological doctrines or outlooks, rather than between socialism and religion as such. For example, there might be, or it might be believed that there is, a fundamental conflict between doctrines of sin which rely upon individual responsibility and socialist accounts of social structure as the cause of societal maladies.[14] Or between views of humans as irremediably corrupt or impotent, and views of humans as capable of harmony, love, and efficacious social change.[15] Such conflicts have been interpreted by socialists variously as proving the unattractiveness and inaccuracy of Christianity, or else as demonstrating the errancy only of that particular doctrine or outlook (a view which itself presupposes the compatibility of socialism and of the true form of Christianity).

A second conception is that socialism is simply neutral on religious questions. This was the view of many nineteenth-century German Social Democrats, who argued that religion was a private matter and therefore beyond the scope of socialism.[16] On such an understanding, socialism is a matter of

[10] Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', 43–44.
[11] Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?*, 81.
[12] Bax, 'Leaders of Modern Thought-XXIII: Karl Marx'. See also, August Bebel's declaration in the Reichstag in 1881 that 'Social Democracy was republican in politics, socialist in economics, and atheist in religion'. Dorrien, *Social Democracy in the Making*, 132.
[13] Lenin, 'Socialism and Religion', 83–87.
[14] Guarneri, 'The Associationists', 45–49.
[15] Beecher, *Victor Considerant*, 65–66.
[16] Dorrien, *Social Democracy in the Making*, 215.

political institutions which secure freedom of conscience and which regulate religion only when and because it intrudes upon the public sphere. On this view, socialists would be welcome to the arguments of Rawlsian political liberalism. Socialists could argue, for example, that political discourse should involve only reasons which are subject to common standards and therefore that religious reasons should be excluded insofar as they are inaccessible to citizens as democratic reasoners. Socialists could maintain that inclusive states offend against the equality of citizens when they communicate that civic status is conditioned on religious identity or that states fail to respect their citizens as self-determining agents when they endorse any comprehensive ethic.[17] According to this account, socialism is a philosophy which applies only to political institutions and has no particular doctrinal commitments.

A third conception identifies socialism as having a 'religious' character in virtue of the way in which socialists relate to their own commitments, values, and ambitions.[18] This often refers to the degree of investment or intensity of feeling generated among adherents by certain institutions and ideologies, rather than to anything about the commitments or values themselves. Or, it describes the imposition of requirements of purity or doctrinal orthodoxy by socialists. It is not unusual for socialists to represent themselves in such terms. For example, Marxist historian Maximilien Rubel argued that 'our [socialists' and communists'] way of thinking resembles that of religious believers', with 'true' or 'real' socialists keen to differentiate themselves from those 'false' socialists who did not believe in the correct 'social theory – we might even say social creed'.[19] Although, Rubel thought, socialists were more like 'primitive believers' who criticise existing institutions because they fail to truly represent the original message of their faith than believers who accept the shifting dogmas of their church.[20] On such an account, the way that socialists relate to their own theory as a 'creed' and demand orthodox commitment to that creed endows socialism with a 'religious' character.[21] This second account

[17] Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion*.
[18] The assumption here is that religious believers have a special kind of relationship to their commitments. This is an assumption that there are good reasons to doubt. See, for example, Laborde, 197–238.
[19] Rubel, 'Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth Century', 11.
[20] Rubel, 10.
[21] It is an open question whether such a description could be applied to almost anyone committed to a set of values or policies and who seeks to expose their incomplete realisation in concrete institutions. That is, to almost any political participant. This is not to deny that socialism has a 'religious' character, but to suggest that such a description might be much more broadly applicable.

suggests that socialism has a 'religious' character in virtue of the kind of commitment which it elicits from socialists.

A fourth account understands socialist organisations as having a 'religious' quality because they incorporate the kinds of ceremonies, rites, and practices which are customarily associated with religions. While the sense of being 'religious' above appealed to the idea that socialists might exhibit the same kind and degree of investment as religious believers, this sense refers to the adoption by socialist organisations of certain rituals and practices. It might be that such practices are borrowed from contemporary religions in virtue of the historical or enduring status of religion in that social world, or because socialists understood themselves to face the same challenges as religious proselytisers: recruiting members, sustaining commitment, cultivating solidarity. Frequently, this has been a conscious process; Vincent Geoghegan describes how the 'Socialist Sunday School' movement in Edwardian Britain was part of a 'wholesale importation of the trappings of Christianity, generating Socialist hymns, Socialist saints, Socialist sacraments, Socialist ritual, and even a Socialist Ten Commandments'. These socialists saw themselves as competing with organised religion and sought to 'appropriate all the various strengths of existing religion but stripped of their theological grounding'.[22] One might also look to the resonances of the Catholic veneration of saints in the cult surrounding Ferdinand Lassalle, or to the Soviet commemorations of Lenin as a Christ-like figure.[23] Early nineteenth-century French socialists were prolific in their borrowing from Catholicism. Saint-Simonians anointed their own 'pope' and required new members to proffer declarations of their faith at open meetings known as 'general communions'.[24] Charles Fourier included forms of Catholic rites in his vision of the sexually-liberated socialist future, with amorous tithes, confessors, and sexual indulgences.[25] To describe socialism as having a 'religious' quality in this sense implies nothing about the content of belief or philosophy, but rather refers to the institutions and practices of socialist movements.

[22] Geoghegan, 'Socialism and Christianity in Edwardian Britain', 47.
[23] Bergman, 'The Image of Jesus in the Russian Revolutionary Movement', 222–26.
[24] Pilbeam, *Saint-Simonians in Nineteenth-Century France*, 26–36.
[25] There is a debate as to whether these were intended to be satirical. Beecher, 'Fourierism and Christianity', 392.

There is a persistent conflation of two claims which express the fifth and sixth associations between socialism and religion. These are the claim that socialism supersedes religion, and the claim that socialism is a new religion. German socialist philosopher Joseph Dietzgen's 1870-5 sermons on *The Religion of Social-Democracy* exemplify the ambiguity. Dietzgen first describes a religion as a practice which pursues the 'salvation of mankind'.[26] Both the old gospel of Christianity, grounded in faith, and the new gospel of socialism, grounded in science, pursue this goal and so are religions. Yet, new productive possibilities require new conceptions of perfection and the supreme being, which are based not in the supernatural, but in humanity. Therefore, '[i]n the place of religion, social-democracy puts humanity', while science shows that the 'progress or development of religion consists in its gradual dissolution'.[27] So while 'social-democracy is all the more the true religion as it strives for the very same end [the salvation of humanity]' with novel means, it also supplants religion with humanity. This kind of conflation occurs because the term 'religion' is used to describe both a domain of human experience and one of the options within that domain; both the overarching category and one example within that category.[28] It is for this reason that the 'religion of baseball' or 'religion without God' are both examples of, and alternatives to, religion.[29] They represent both one option within the category of 'religion' (as a domain of human experience) and a rival to the sub-category of 'religion' (within that domain). It is a failure to recognise this ambiguity which can lead to elision between the claims that socialism is a religion and that socialism supersedes religion.

This same conflation can be witnessed also with Joshua Muravchik's account of socialism as 'the story of man's most ambitious attempt to supplant religion with a doctrine about how life ought to be lived that claimed grounding in science rather than revelation'.[30] By 'socialism', Muravchik appears to mean a form of economically deterministic Marxism, although he seems to think that other variants of socialism are vulnerable to the same criticisms and identifiable in the same terms. On Muravchik's account, all humans have a basic need for a spiritual life, and after the Enlightenment had discredited Christianity and so removed one prominent way of satisfying that need, socialism had stepped in as a

[26] Dietzgen, 'The Religion of Social Democracy', 92.
[27] Dietzgen, 118.
[28] Lee, *Recognizing the Non-Religious*, 192–96.
[29] Cohen, 'Baseball as a National Religion'; Dworkin, *Religion Without God*.
[30] Muravchik, *Heaven on Earth*, 3.

replacement. First, 'Robert Owen's movement with its church-like "halls of science" aimed to fill the need, but he was unable to fashion a coherent doctrine'. Following this failure, it was Engels and Marx who 'succeeded in recasting socialism into a compelling religious faith, and their socialism absorbed or eclipsed all others'.[31] But, lamentably, socialism failed to provide an internal code of conduct and so turns 'history into a morality play without the morality'.[32] Muravchik's account is obscure and implausible. A purported sequence of declining Christianity being replaced by socialism jars with the religiosity of nineteenth-century Britain, or the fact that almost all French socialists in the 1830s and 1840s understood themselves to be inspired by Catholicism and Christianity.[33] It is not at all clear that Marxian socialism 'absorbed or eclipsed all others' nor is it obvious what is meant by 'a morality play without the morality'. More important are the features in virtue of which Muravchik holds socialism to be a 'religious faith': its declaration of inevitability, its historical reductionism, its tying salvation to the triumph of an oppressed class, its narrative of redemption. These are neither necessary nor jointly sufficient for being a 'religion'.[34] Nor are they an accurate description of many forms of socialism.

Not all accounts occlude this distinction between socialism as a, and socialism as a replacement for, religion. Willard Wolfe identifies late Victorian socialism in England as 'a fully fledged substitute faith' for former evangelicals who had been moved by scepticism to seek a 'secular faith'. Wolfe argues that the socialism of this period shared much with earlier radicalism: a common set of values, resistance to privilege, and a commitment to equality. Yet, socialism differed from radicalism in that its attempts to 'transform the moral character of mankind' made it a possible object of faith. The parallels between Victorian evangelicalism and socialism, the way that both promoted an uncompromising and optimistic application of conscience to politics, meant that socialism could be a 'substitute faith'. Such parallels made it easy for former evangelicals, rocked by a crisis of faith, to 'take up the demand for a thoroughgoing moralization of society that is the basis of the Western Socialist tradition, and thus to

[31] Muravchik, 341.
[32] Muravchik, 344.
[33] Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics*; Berenson, 'A New Religion of the Left'.
[34] Anja Kirsch explains the tendency to identify socialism as a form of religion as a reflex on the part of readers who mistakenly respond to narrative features reminiscent of religion rather than to the secular content of those narratives. For example, socialist novels include a distinctive 'master plot' in which the hero experiences a transformation which evokes for readers 'narrative scheme of conversion'. Here it is 'the emplotment of the narratives and not necessarily their content that evokes religion', with the form of a religious narrative filled with the secular contents of the hero's transformation. Kirsch, 'Religious in Form, Socialist in Content', 154–68.

accept some form of Socialism as a substitute faith'.[35] It was this which made socialism a 'quasi-religious phenomenon: the earliest and most familiar of the socially oriented substitute faiths'.[36]

Willard Wolfe emphasises the importance of the 'crisis of faith' in the late-Victorian period in influencing the adoption, and shaping the content, of forms of socialism. Wolfe notes that, in England, the earlier radicalism shared 'a complex of moral attitudes, hostilities, and values' with socialism: a resistance to privilege and status, commitment to equality, and the rejection of 'taxes' (either by the government of 'Old Corruption' or by capitalists exploiting labourers). Amidst these similarities, the 'most historically important contrast between the Radical and Socialist traditions, however, was probably the fact that the latter, through its claim to transform the moral character of mankind, constituted a fully fledged substitute faith'.[37] Radicalism rested on Nonconformist and Evangelical theology, and its adherents continued to be Christians. Yet, for those evangelical Radicals 'whose faith was undermined by the strong currents of nineteenth-century scepticism, the old Radical creed might, thereafter, seem inadequate either to make up the loss or to function independently. And that was precisely why dissatisfied Radical intellectuals in need of a secular faith turned increasingly to Socialism to fill that need in the decades following the Darwinian revolution'.[38] This process was aided by the similarities between Victorian evangelicalism and socialism: the demand for the public implementation of righteousness and an uncompromising and optimistic application of conscience to politics. Such similarities made it easier for Evangelical agnostics 'to take up the demand for a thoroughgoing moralization of society that is the basis of the Western Socialist tradition, and thus to accept some form of Socialism as a substitute faith'.[39] Wolfe's account emphasises both the ways in which this form of English socialism supplanted faith, and the ways in which it offered continuity. Some emphasise how the activities or practices of socialism enabled it to replace religion. Wolfe's argument, by contrast, identifies this role as being performed by the uncompromising moralisation which lay at the heart of the socialism's aim to transform the 'moral character of mankind'. Socialism was a 'quasi-religious

[35] Wolfe, *From Radicalism to Socialism*, 14.
[36] Wolfe, 14.
[37] Wolfe, 9; 13.
[38] Wolfe, 13.
[39] Wolfe, 14.

phenomenon: the earliest and most familiar of the socially oriented substitute faiths'.[40] Wolfe's account draws especially upon the idea of a crisis of faith, brought about by moral qualms, historical biblical criticism, and the increasing explanatory power of science, as motivating the adoption of socialism as a 'substitute faith'.[41]

To identify socialism as a replacement for religion is to suggest that it fulfils the same functions as, while diverging in some other fundamental way from, traditional religions. Such an account is offered by Alasdair MacIntyre in *Marxism and Christianity*. MacIntyre dismisses the suggestion that Marxism straightforwardly *is* a religion, arguing that such a suggestion requires that one interpret the cults of Lenin or Stalin as representative of socialism as such. However, MacIntyre maintains, Marxism does inherit the functions of the 'great historical religions'. Such religions offer 'a vision of an alternative', and 'in the contrast between what society tells a man he is and what religion tells him he is' supply 'grounds both for criticizing the *status quo* and for believing that it is possible for him to act with others in changing it'.[42] Those who lack a religious perspective lack also 'any alternative framework of beliefs which would enable them to criticize and transform society'.[43] For those who are socially excluded, it is an 'urgent necessity' that they find a 'secular doctrine of man and society that would have the scope and functions of religion but [which] would at the same time be rational in the sense that it would be open to amendment by critical reflection at every point'.[44] It 'was precisely under these conditions, and to express and meet these needs, that Marxism arose'.[45] MacIntyre's account identifies Marxism as fulfilling the functions of the 'great historical religions' for the socially excluded of modern industrial societies.[46]

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[40] Wolfe, 14.

[41] Conversely, Gareth Stedman Jones identifies secularisation as explaining not the *rise*, but rather the *decline*, of socialism. He argues that the 'marked secularization of political beliefs in the decades after 1950' as equally important in bringing about the 'crises of socialist doctrine and the collapse of communist states' as 'political, military and socio-economic factors'. It was the processes of secularisation after the second world war which witnessed the 'fall of a powerful and organized post-Christian religion that, in the name of science, addressed itself to the oppressed'. Stedman Jones, 'Introduction', 10.

[42] MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, 3–4.

[43] MacIntyre, 4.

[44] MacIntyre, 5.

[45] MacIntyre, 5.

[46] MacIntyre also argues that specific facets of Marx's philosophy are themselves secularised forms of Christian theology. The confidence that capitalism's replacement would be socialism rather than merely a different class society was simply 'a humanistic belief in the possibilities and resources of human nature', a belief which was 'a secularized version of a Christian virtue'. MacIntyre, 92.

The seventh sense in which one might understand this relationship is that socialism requires the establishment of a new religion. Gregory Claeys argues that this view was widespread among many followers of 'nineteenth-century non-Marxian socialism', who 'propos[ed] a "new religion", a paradise on earth based upon harmony rather than competition'.[47] French socialist Pierre Leroux exemplifies this understanding of socialism as requiring the establishment of a new religion. Leroux was a former Saint-Simonian who argued that Christianity had become obsolete and social problems could be overcome only with a new, democratic religion.[48] He maintained that Christianity had been corrupted by the influence of political leaders, with the introduction of ritual, the empowerment of the priesthood, the presentation of the world as controlled by the Devil, and the replacement of an early celebration of humans as rational and autonomous with a bleak vision of humankind as passive and sinful. Leroux dismissed this account of humanity and rejected the otherworldliness of Christianity. Instead, he argued, socialism required a new religion, which would bind people together in pursuit of earthly ideals and would lead them to see that humans could express their love for God only by loving others.[49] Other socialists disagree about the reasons why existing religions are inadequate or harmful and therefore about the shape which a novel socialist religion must take. Often these reasons are of two different kinds. The first is that the failings of existing religions have left 'cultural and religious vacuum', in which existing sources of epistemic and moral authority had been fatally undermined by social upheaval.[50] French socialists in the early nineteenth century had seen the hegemony of the Catholic Church weakened and the failure of alternative attempts to identify a source of moral reasons and a ground for social solidarity. They believed that a new religion was necessary in order to provide an antidote against the poison of individualism, to provide a 'source of the shared beliefs necessary to bind together a fragmented society'.[51] For these socialists, religion was important in binding people

[47] Claeys, 'Non-Marxian Socialism 1815-1914', 545–47.
[48] Bakunin, 'Pierre Leroux', 58. According to Quentin Schwank, Owen's 'religion of charity' offered the model for Leroux's 'religion de la fraternité, and Leroux periodically adopted Owenite concepts such as 'charity' and 'community' to describe his own 'fraternité. Schwanck, 'Robert Owen's Influence on French Republicanism in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', 7.
[49] Bakunin, 'Pierre Leroux', 58–70.
[50] Beecher, *Victor Considerant*, 34; Beecher, 'Early European Socialism', 373; Musso, 'Religion and Political Economy in Saint-Simon'.
[51] Beecher, 'Fourierism and Christianity', 400; Faccarello and Steiner, 'Religion and Political Economy in Early 19th Century France'. According to Jonathan Beecher, this marks a contrast between Fourier and his acolytes. While Fourier's writings on religion included a 'playful, irreverent and pagan streak' and he saw the Christian

together, and a novel socialist religion was a necessary part of their response to a vacuum of moral authority in a context of social disintegration. A similar motivation can be seen in the establishment of the Labour Church by former Unitarian minister John Trevor in 1891. Over the next two decades, 120 such churches were established across the United Kingdom, holding 'services' on Sundays, which included sermons by eminent speakers, 'labour hymns sung to old chapel tunes', and socialism presented as an 'ethical gospel'.[52] Trevor believed that existing forms of religion were alienating the working class; churches were silent on injustice, hostile to socialist political candidates, and embodied 'essentially middle-class values'. In response, Trevor established 'an alternative working-class religion', a 'social' religion which was committed to the fight against injustice and which argued that each had a personal relationship with God, permitting participants to also belong to other churches according to their doctrinal commitments.[53] Facing the inadequacy of existing religious institutions, Trevor sought to establish a novel, socialist religion.

The second kind of reason why socialists have rejected existing forms of religion is that those forms offered an obstacle to social change. Many other French socialists were concerned that the French Revolution had failed to win sufficient support because of the enduring hold of Catholicism, a hold which endured because alternatives such as the Cult of Reason had lacked emotional richness or depth.[54] They understood that Catholicism was an obstacle to social change but that it could not simply be abolished; it had to be replaced.[55] Previous alternatives had failed to convince a population who remained wedded to their faith, so it was necessary to 'create a new form of *pouvoir spirituel* capable of dislodging the ideological power of the Catholic Church', a spiritual power which would take the form of a new 'social science'.[56] For these socialists, the 'original and most enduring ambition of socialism was not to displace the state, but the church'.[57]

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church as 'a powerful agent of repressive moral doctrines', his 'disciples were romantic intellectuals with deep and unsatisfied religious longings'. Beecher, 'Fourierism and Christianity', 392.

[52] Turner, *The Labour Church*, 56.

[53] Turner, 11; 103–4.

[54] Stedman Jones, 'Utopian Socialism Reconsidered', 142.

[55] Berenson, 'A New Religion of the Left', 544–57; Stedman Jones, 'Religion and Liberty in European Political Thought', 590.

[56] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 174; See also, Stedman Jones, 'Religion and Liberty in European Political Thought', 590; Stedman Jones, 'Millennium and Enlightenment', 1.

[57] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 174.

An eighth way of characterising the relationship between socialism and religion identifies certain (primarily Christian) theological traditions as offering ethical resources or imaginative materials for socialism, as providing reasons to endorse socialism, or giving content to socialist values. Victor Kiernan identifies Christianity as 'the parent or fosterparent of socialism' because Christianity deepened appreciation of human interdependence and nurtured the belief that 'private ownership was a corrupting innovation, and communal ownership the natural usage of mankind'. Yet, Kiernan also notes that the Christian Church has also endorsed the converse position, justifying the institution of private property as necessitated by the fallen condition of humankind.[58] This prompts the suspicion that while Christianity is the 'parent' of socialism, it is also the parent of just about any European political outlook given Christianity's deep and enduring influence upon European social and intellectual life. Similarly, Gregory Claeys suggests that socialism has a Christian grounding in virtue of its conferring particular importance on an idea of equality which was 'Christian in origin', emerging first as the equality of all as children of God.[59] Yet, any plausible contemporary political theory will attribute importance to the value of equality.[60] In each case, this is not to deny that socialism has a philosophical grounding in Christianity. Instead, it is to suggest that this fails to identify anything special about or particular to socialism.

Other accounts are more specific in identifying a genealogy particular to socialism, either in shaping the philosophy or explaining the adoption of socialism. Edward Berenson argues that theological shifts in French Catholicism in the mid-nineteenth century shaped a mentality among French workers which was receptive to the socialist message of solidarity and moral transformation.[61] After the disruption of the French Revolution, the Catholic Church could no longer rely upon its traditional authority, turning instead to a simpler catechism of love, compassion, and fraternity in order to reclaim adherents.[62] Such a theological shift prepared the minds of French workers for socialism. Similarly, Mark Bevir emphasises the importance of the theological context of mid-Victorian Britain in explaining the

[58] Kiernan, 'Socialism: The Prophetic Memory', 17–18.
[59] Claeys, 'Early Socialism as Intellectual History', 899.
[60] Will Kymlicka describes the endorsement of the value of moral equality as an 'egalitarian plateau', a precondition for the plausibility of any political theory. Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 5.
[61] Berenson, 'A New Religion of the Left', 556.
[62] Berenson, 550.

emergence of socialism. Bevir argues that there were rising doubts about the truth of the Bible, fuelled by repulsion at the cruelty of damnation, perceived discrepancies with evolutionary science, and emerging scholarship questioning the historical accuracy of scripture. However, Bevir argues that these doubts did not precipitate the abandonment of faith but its reformulation into an immanentist belief in a purposive world in harmony with God. This grounded a theology in which believers were encouraged to cooperate with God's purposes by joining in spiritual fellowship with others. Such a theology was an important source of values and grounding for arguments for 'ethical socialists' who sought the transformation of economic power only if and to the extent that this expressed or contributed towards the spiritual ideal of fellowship.[63] This form of socialism was not, then, rooted in an economic analysis but rather expressed a vision of fellowship as a way of participating in God's purposes. And this vision was, in turn, dependent upon an immanentist theology which had come to replace biblical literalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. On Bevir's account, Victorian ethical socialism can be understood only in light of this theological shift towards immanentism.[64] As an example of the theological grounding of socialism, one might also point to the way in which F.D. Maurice's Christian Socialism was rooted in an understanding of the nature of the Incarnation, of Hell as a state of being rather than a place of eternal torment, and of God as essentially loving.[65] In each of these instances, of Christocentric Catholicism, immanentist ethical socialism, and Maurice's Christian Socialism, a particular theology helped to nurture socialist thought: creating a climate and cultivating modes of thought which made socialism plausible and attractive.[66]

This chapter has described eight accounts of the relationship between socialism and religion: of socialism as philosophically opposed to religion; of socialism as neutral on religious questions; of socialists as relating to their commitments in a 'religious' manner; of socialist organisations adopting

[63] Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, 186–96.
[64] Bevir, 186.
[65] Sansom, 'From God to Man?', 155–58.
[66] One might also see such traditions as grounding not socialism as such, but instead as supporting particular conceptions of socialism. Vanessa Cook argues that religious activists encouraged American socialists after the Second World War to abandon class categories in favour of a social analysis which regarded each individual as 'a sacred agent of God'. Similarly, they argued that socialism was to be advanced not through the actions of the state, but through the enrichment of public morality and the diffusion of an ethic of fellowship. On this account, particular theological traditions might support not socialism as such, but one particular vision of the social analysis and political strategy of socialism. Cook, *Spiritual Socialists*, 4; 9–21.

customarily religious practices; of socialism as replacing, or being a, religion; of socialism as requiring the establishment of a novel religion; and of socialism as being grounded in certain (primarily Christian) theological traditions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have described a form of socialist engagement with religion which was not limited either to the adoption of scriptural justifications to be offered in support of independently-grounded socialist arguments or to hostility to the pernicious mystifications of religion. I have argued that the focus of Owenites upon religious transformation as a means and end of socialism has often been neglected or misunderstood, and argued that this element of Owenite socialism should be recentred in interpretations of the movement. I have argued that this neglect and misunderstanding reflects a broader conception of socialism as essentially secular which encouraged scholars to perceive religion as redundant, archaic, or private. Often the religious concerns of Owenites have been interpreted as reflecting personal idiosyncrasy or eccentricity; the preoccupation of individuals with odd views. They have been dismissed as un-socialist. I have argued instead that such concerns were central to their vision of socialism. Further, I have emphasised that the nature of the Owenite critique can be understood only as a response to the particular religious conditions of early nineteenth-century Britain, conditions of intense division, of the conservatism of religious institutions, and of an evangelical mood. These particular features not only prompted Owenite critique, but also motivated their attempt to identify a truer form of religion. And this attempt involved participating in ongoing arguments about the relationship between knowledge of God and knowledge of the natural world, the relationship between reason, revelation, and authority, or about the degree to which the clergy enjoyed special access to religious truth. They drew upon the traditions of natural theology, popular religion, deism, and Rational Dissent in formulating their own socialist account of religion. And this was a *socialist* account of religion in the sense that it was rooted in their fundamental philosophical preoccupations. These Owenites understood themselves to be religious reformers, rivals to the Oxford Movement and successors to the Reformation, whose establishment of socialism both required the establishment of religious truth and was attractive in virtue of its popularisation of religious virtue.

In this Conclusion, I identify some implications to be drawn from this thesis. First, about the relationship between religion and politics (Section 7.1). Second, about the practice of the history of political thought (Section 7.2). Third, about Owenism's influence upon subsequent socialism (Section

7.3). Fourth, about the history of socialism more broadly (Section 7.4). Finally, I suggest some lessons which contemporary socialists might draw from the example of Owenite socialism (Section 7.5).

7.1 Politics and Religion

In this section, I suggest some implications that one might draw from this thesis about the broad relationship between religion and politics. In this thesis, I suggest that there are ways of conceptualising the relationship between religion and politics which are not always included in conventional, contemporary debates in political theory about this relationship. In such debates, it often appears that there are only two available ways of conceptualising this relationship. First, there are liberal approaches which assume that politics should regulate manifestations of religion, containing and protecting expression and belief by bounding them in the private sphere while preventing the intrusion of religion into the activities of the state. Second, there are theocratic approaches in which politics is subordinated to the goals and values of a particular religion. Such a narrowing of the available options is apparent particularly within liberal egalitarian political theory, which focuses primarily upon the limits of acceptable public discourse and upon the availability of exemptions from generally applicable rules on grounds of religious commitment. Attention focuses upon whether disadvantages which arise from conscientious religious obligations are proof that a citizen has not been treated with equal respect.[1] Or whether and how religious commitments might be permitted to play a role in public discourse without this offending against the principle of democratic citizenship, in which participants express respect for others only when they offer reasons which can be understood, recognised, and potentially shared.[2] These are clearly pressing philosophical questions for liberal political theorists exploring the role of religion in pluralistic polities. However, they do not exhaust the space of possible inquiries.

In this thesis, I have explored some alternative facets of the relationship between religion and politics, and in particular some positive facets of this relationship which I maintain have been frequently

[1] See, for example, Dworkin, *Religion Without God*; Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion*.
[2] See, for example, Lister, *Public Reason and Political Community*; Rawls, *Political Liberalism*; Quong, *Liberalism Without Perfection*.

neglected. By positive facets, I mean those senses in which the development of politics has relied upon an engagement with religion. Attention is more often directed towards religious influences as reflecting or inhibiting the development of a mature practical politics of persuasion and consensus by nurturing hopes of imminent, apocalyptic change. This thesis has identified how socialism emerged as a response to the challenges posed by contemporary religion and drew upon ingredients drawn from the religious context. Such an argument therefore lends and receives support from similar claims about both liberalism and mass politics itself.

It is now widely recognised that, both in its historical origins and in its philosophical motivations, liberalism represents a response to religious controversy. Early liberals such as Pierre Bayle or John Locke were asking how the polity should respond to the fact of intractable religious disagreement. Their attempts to explore the limits of permissible belief, the preconditions for political membership, and the nature of citizens' rights to freedom of conscience were motivated by the need to respond to this disagreement. Without the possibility of doctrinal convergence, the animating questions were how polities which were implacably divided on religious grounds could subsist in a just and peaceful manner, and how the rights of citizens to pursue their own religious projects might tesselate fairly in a diverse and divided polity. Their response was to contain and protect matters of belief within the private sphere, expunging religious conflict from the political realm while extending toleration to diverse beliefs. The same challenge, and a similar response, is found in the even in the foremost recent example of liberal political theory: John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*. For both early and later liberals, deep and enduring religious disagreement was a fundamental ingredient of political life, and addressing that disagreement in a way which was compatible with justice and civic unity was the animating challenge of liberal politics.

Scholars have also begun to tentatively explore how the emergence of large-scale political organisation relied upon identities and scripts borrowed from religion. It is easy to forget that political participation, acting together with large numbers of distant others in sustained pursuit of shared political goals, is not a 'natural' form of behaviour but one which must be developed and learned. It requires sources of inspiration, models to emulate, and examples to follow. It is increasingly coming to be recognised that these were often drawn from contemporary religion. This includes the mechanisms which were

deployed to express political conviction and exert political pressure and the very idea of an identity as a member of a movement (an identity, for example, *as a Methodist* or *as a socialist*). Craig Calhoun identifies how movements both supportive and opposed to slavery in the United States

> drew importantly on religious sources. These included not only motivations but also social networks, practical experience in public speaking, resources of physical space and funds, ideals of justice, visions of peace, language for grasping the connection between contemporary problems and deeper moral values, and capacities to both generate the recognise the power of prophetic disruptions to the complacency of everyday life.[3]

Early political movements, most famously the campaign against slavery and the Chartist movement for the extension of political rights, focused upon the collection of signatures and presentation of petitions as a mechanism to exert influence. This vital instrument in the political armoury was itself adopted from religiously-based organisations, such as Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association, which organised huge petitions, relying upon the institutions of the Catholic Church in Ireland to recruit and communicate with members. Similarly, the model of the open public meeting and pyramid structure of representation, which were widely used in nineteenth-century British mass politics, were inspired by the example of the Quakers.[4] Others emphasise the importance of religious organisations in cultivating the psychic discipline which was necessary for the emergence of mass politics. Such discipline, inculcated by churches and religious benevolent organisations, prevented outbursts of violence or expressions of disunity which would have undermined the shared pursuit of political goals. In this way, according to Maartje Janse, 'modern mass politics was fundamentally shaped by religious practices and techniques, especially those of Methodism'.[5] Such a reliance of mass politics upon the techniques used and virtues nurtured by religious organisations is in many ways unsurprising given the absence of other available models of how to recruit, mobilise, and coordinate the pursuit of distant objectives.

[3] Calhoun, 'Afterword: Religion's Many Powers', 122.
[4] Stamatov, 'The Religious Field and the Path-Dependent Transformation'.
[5] Janse, 'A Dangerous Type of Politics?', 62–65.

Both of these examples, of the emergence of liberalism as a response to religious disagreement and of the dependence of early political organisations upon resources drawn from contemporary religious institutions, reflect the ways in which engagement with religion shaped the development of modern politics. Something similar might be said about the socialists discussed in this thesis, who also responded to the challenge of religious division and drew upon the imaginative and organisational resources of contemporary religious institutions. Their example therefore lends further support to accounts of the centrality of religious challenges, organisations, and discourse to the development of modern politics.

7.2 Practice in the History of Political Thought

In Section 7.2, I suggest that one might also draw implications from this thesis about the conduct of the history of political thought more broadly. In this thesis, I have focused upon the *popular* production of political theory, upon the ways in which political thought is found not only in philosophical treatises but also, and perhaps more so, in journals, debates, or pamphlets. While such sources might be less systematic and comprehensive, this does not justify their relative neglect in comparison to the attention which is conferred upon Robert Owen or upon figures such as William Thompson or John Francis Bray. It is not the case that theoretical novelty flowed downwards from these individuals while ordinary members were unsystematic or inconsistent. I argue that scholars should be more interested in popular Owenite theory for two reasons. The first reason is a general one. Scholars should be concerned to achieve a fuller understanding of political discourse by grasping the breadth of participants in its formation, identifying the range of perspectives and arguments which contributed to socialist political discourse. The second reason concerns Owenism in particular. Owenism is itself distinctive in the history of political thought in virtue of its contribution to popular politics, and by focusing upon newspapers, journals, and pamphlets, one can focus upon that sense in which Owenism is most historically and politically significant. That is, by focusing upon the forums in which Owenite popular politics was developed and expressed, one can focus upon the most salient and important contribution of Owenites to the emergence of political discourse.

Owenite journals were not merely concerned with publicising meetings, providing records of recent debates, coordinating activities, informing members about the activities of other, geographically distant Owenites, or recruiting members. Instead, they were also concerned with theoretical production. Arguing that scholars should take this theoretical production more seriously stands in contrast to the arguments of, for example, Richard Ashcraft, who maintains that it is a grievous error to apply such standards. Instead, Ashcraft argues, that participants in politics are less interested in 'analytic models of theoretical consistency' than later historians, that these participants were untroubled by apparent conflicts or any absence of 'logical consistency', because for them 'political theory was meaningful from the standpoint of practical action, of mobilizing individuals to secure their rights and benefits'.[6] Richard Ashcraft argues that applying the standards of relatively disinterested, philosophically trained theorists to the workers of the politically engaged campaigner is a mistake, misunderstanding the purpose of the work. I disagree.

Owenites' relationship to popular theory was not merely instrumental in part because they attributed such force to the *right arguments*. It was a view shared among Owenites, and promoted particularly by Owen himself, that the force of reason was such that it would compel readers to accept the right arguments. The political tools which would bring about the socialist future would therefore, they maintained, be the right arguments. Such an assumption collapses the distinction between persuasion and truth; that the truth, and the truth alone, will bring about the acceptance and endorsement of socialism. So long as the theory was *right*, it would be recognised and endorsed by all those who were rational, and socialism would be immediately implemented. This suggests that there is a difference between Owenites and other kinds of campaigning journalists. For many campaigning journalists, the object is to be believed or to win an argument and there are no particular constraints on the means to be used in pursuit of these goals. The objective is to win, and arguments which are ill-considered, ambiguous, and confused can serve this goal just as well as those which aim at truth. By contrast, for many Owenites, they attributed such importance to the role of reason that it was assumed that political goals would be achieved if, and only if, they were able to marshal true arguments. The key to achieving

[6] Ashcraft, 'Liberal Political Theory and Working-Class Radicalism', 266.

socialism, they maintained, was establishing and publicising such correct arguments. In this sense they differ from campaigning journalists who may have been comfortable with the use of rhetoric or ambiguity to conceal unclarity or to muddy a difficult question, obfuscating where there is argumentative weakness and dismissing reasonable objections. It is in virtue of their conception of truth as demanding assent that Owenites are committed to the pursuit of truth in the same way that characterises the discipline of political theory.

In a sense, this observation is the converse of Quentin Skinner's argument that works of political theory should always be understood as interventions in particular battles at particular moments, with immediate goals and animating purposes. As well as addressing philosophical questions, Skinner notes, such texts should also be seen as interventions into specific controversies, as arguments about what should be done at a particular time. Just as Skinner argued that philosophical texts are always also political interventions, so the converse point can be made about Owenite journals. By interpreting Owenite journals or pamphlets as only polemical or narrowly parochial, one neglects the extent to which they are also addressed to philosophical questions. It is easy to neglect that, amidst the advertisements for lectures, calls for funds, exerts from rival publications, or rebuttals of anti-socialist tirades, there are also attempts to consider philosophical controversies. It is easy to neglect that while pursuing an immediate goal, whether persuading a possible adherent, defusing an objection, or defeating an opponent, many articles were also aiming to achieve a truer account of socialism. Just as one should remain aware that philosophical texts also have immediate and narrow political motivations, it is also the case that narrowly political texts, which seek to persuade or motivate or agitate, might also have philosophical goals.

7.3 Owenism's Influence on Subsequent Socialism

The third implication that can be drawn from this thesis concerns Owenism's influence upon subsequent socialism. The interpretative question of the ways in which, and degree to which, socialism in early nineteenth-century Britain should be understood to influence the subsequent tradition is a difficult one. Scholars including Gareth Stedman Jones have been confident in arguing that there are

certain features of early socialism which endure throughout the history of socialism, such that they can help to explain the 'collapse of communist states' over a century and a half later. Stedman Jones argues that later incarnations of socialism carried forward the assumptions of early socialism. He holds that by recognising the 'cosmological framework' of early socialism one can come to make sense of the tradition of socialist 'internationalism' or the 'zigzag trajectory between purist abstention and opportunist endorsement so often followed by socialist movements and parties during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'. It even allows one to better understand 'the unblinking defence of the Hitler–Stalin pact by tens of thousands of Communists or the brief love affair between *gauchiste* French intellectuals and the Chinese Cultural Revolution'.[7] And it elucidates how 'the crises of socialist doctrine and the collapse of communist states' were caused in part by 'the marked secularization of political beliefs in the decades after 1950'.[8] Stedman Jones's argument about how this influence can be traced through time must rely upon the assumption either that there is something essential which defines what socialism is, or the construction of a lineage of influence by early socialism upon later socialism. That is, to maintain that the 'cosmological framework' of early nineteenth-century socialism sheds light upon the actions of '*gauchiste* French intellectuals', one must either assume that investigation of early nineteenth-century socialism sheds light upon the structure of thought of a phenomenon called 'socialism' which then allows one to understand the socialism of French intellectuals. Or one must trace the route through which that 'cosmological framework' was inherited and diffused. I am sceptical of the former way of thinking about socialism as having a basic essence of socialism which is revealed by inquiry and which is shared between different instances of socialism. Therefore, in order to argue that Owenite socialism should lead one to think differently about later socialism, it is necessary to establish that there were mechanisms through which Owenite ideas and arguments were carried forward.

Surprisingly, given the scale of Owenite organisations and the circulation of Owenite journals and newspapers, it is not straightforward to identify its political and philosophical legacy after the demise of organised Owenism in the late 1840s. Historians of Owenism have claimed variously that 'I cannot

[7] Stedman Jones, 'Religion and the Origins of Socialism', 187–88.
[8] Stedman Jones, 'Introduction', 10.

come up with any late 20th-century Owenite legacy to the communities movement' or that, with much of Owen's work 'one faces the difficulty…of being unable to make any direct links or trace any obvious lineage'.[9] It is often suggested that there was a mid-century lacuna in British socialism which divided Owenism or the Christian Socialism of Maurice and Ludlow from the Fabianism, Labour Churches, and Marxism of the 1880s and 1890s.[10] If there were such a lacuna, it might serve as a buffer for the transmission of ideas and arguments, which might make lines of influence and affinity both more unlikely and obscure. There were certainly individuals who had been educated through and shaped by their participation in the Owenite movement, and would go on to enjoy long careers in the wider world of radicalism. Through such individuals, it might have been the case that Owenite arguments and assumptions carried forward into later socialism. For example, G.J. Holyoake remained an influential figure in the trade union and co-operative movements for the remainder of the century, writing the first seminal history of the co-operative movement. John Weston was a prominent figure in the first International Workingmen's Association. John Watts remained an advocate for the extension of education, was a motor force behind the establishment of Manchester's Central Library, and a leading writer in later newspapers such as the *Co-operative News*.[11] Further afield, John Francis Bray almost ran for the Presidency of the United States.[12] These were individuals whose influence extended outwards, and even after the wider movement had receded, the core assumptions of Owenite socialism might have endured. After all, this was a movement which enjoyed some longevity, being active for much of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and considerable scale, reaching millions of people through pamphlets, journals, newspapers, lectures, debates, and organisations such as the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union. Owenites certainly participated in forging some lasting philosophical and linguistic associations, which linked, for example, environmentalism and determinism to socialism.[13]

These associations and established patterns might not be carried forward through visible, clear routes of transmission, but rather might be conveyed on more diffuse, indirect, mediated avenues through

[9] Coates, 'Communities of Co-Operation'; Cato, 'Emancipation from Monetary Exploitation'.
[10] Finn, *After Chartism*.
[11] Saville, 'John Watts (1818-87)'.
[12] Jolliffe, 'John Francis Bray'.
[13] Barrow, 'Determinism and Environmentalism in Socialist Thought'.

which ideas and concepts might enter into popular consciousness. It is, of course, challenging to identify the pervasive ways in which Owenite socialism might have contributed to a set of expectations, preconceptions, and understandings of the nature of socialism among that majority of a population who do not contribute to the written record. That inchoate and rough sense of what socialism is which exists in popular memory would have been shaped by experience of Owenite socialism. Such an experience might have planted seeds which lay dormant until being activated by the resurgence of socialism in Britain towards the end of the century. Even without clear, identifiable lines of influence, carried by a particular text, individual, or organisation, one should not rule out the possibility of Owenite socialism having shaped later incarnations of socialism.

7.4 History of Socialism

The fourth implication concerns Owenism's position in the history of socialism. Owenism is often granted a position of prominence in histories of socialism, and it is in virtue of this position that re-evaluation of Owenism has potentially significant implications for understandings of the nature and history of socialism itself. Further, the most fertile areas for future exploration which emerge from this thesis also refer to elements of the history of socialism which might be subject to re-interpretation or re-examination as a result of my conclusions. Yet, I argued in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.2) that interpretation of Owenism has been unduly shaped by later socialists, including Fabian and Marxist socialists, projecting their own understandings of socialism backwards through time. I argued that Owenism has been misinterpreted precisely because of a determination to set Owenites within the history of socialism, asking about their anticipations of, or influence upon, subsequent socialism. It might seem odd to claim, therefore, that the most extensive implications of this thesis concern the ways in which re-evaluation of Owenism might encourage reconsideration of the history of socialism.

This oddness is, however, illusory. My objection in Chapter 2 was not a principled objection to any attempt to understand Owenites in virtue of their significance for later socialism. Instead, my objection was to the *particular account* of the history of socialism, the way in which Fabian or Marxist accounts of socialism offered inappropriate moulds for the interpretation of Owenism, such that Owenism was

left malformed and warped. Socialism has been, at times, a governing philosophy for billions of people across the world, and it is obviously the case that Owenism's relationship to subsequent socialism confers historical significance upon the movement. The following section will note some parallels with later socialism and will explore some questions about the history of subsequent socialism which are left open by my account.

This thesis argues that socialism should be understood more broadly than has traditionally been the case. This is not to suggest that scholars are wrong about the philosophical values of socialism, but instead that socialists might pursue or promote those values in ways that have been neglected, embracing a wider range of interests, exploring a greater variety of questions, and reflecting a greater diversity of influences. Recognition of this breadth might have been hindered by the interpretive lens supplied by later Marxism, which encourages a narrow and linear understanding of socialism. The questions asked of socialism are those suggested by Marxism, which investigate the traditional problematics of Marxism, and which explore the extent to which other forms of socialism anticipate, align, or deviate from Marxism. Such questions concern the relationship between class identity and political mobilisation, the extent to which moral considerations should play a role in the critique of capitalism, whether change could be gradual or cataclysmic, or the relationship between economic arrangements and class organisation. Scholars search for accounts of society as divided into classes according to the social and economic position of members.[14] Or ask whether violent revolutionary means were regarded as necessary to achieve change.[15] Subjected to such questions, forms of non- or pre-Marxist socialism which lack clear answers to questions that are not their own can therefore appear muddled or unsystematic. Conversely, the rehabilitation of such socialists can then be achieved by demonstrating their affinity with, or influence upon, later Marxian socialists. In both instances, where

[14] Miliband, 'The Politics of Robert Owen', 243; Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen*, 54; Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites', 17; Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*; Thompson, 'Senex's Letters on Associated Labour', 11–15.

[15] Rogers, 'Robert Owen, Utopian Socialism and Social Transformation', 260–61; Thompson, 'Senex's Letters on Associated Labour', 18.

the questions asked are those of Marxism or where legitimation is conferred by parallels to Marxism, a single vision of the nature and history of socialism.[16]

This thesis might lead one to reconsider the nature and history of socialism, to ask anew who should be included in this history, to re-examine when and why socialism emerged. Accounts of socialism often emphasise that it emerged from particular circumstances, as a response to particular challenges, and as prescribing distinctive solutions to those challenges. Such accounts focus upon the configuration of economic relationships of production and exchange as posing the problem which animated socialists, and the rearrangement of those relationship as the socialist solution to those problems. The 'essence of modern socialism', it is argued, lies in the 'common ownership of the means of production'.[17] Socialism is 'the transference of ownership in land and capital from private hands into their possession in some form or other by the society'.[18] It responds to the consolidation of land and capital in private ownership and requires the apparatus of the state to reallocate power over these resources, expanding social power over production, distribution, and the organisation of labour. Socialism is identified with an economic analysis focused upon the critique of economic value, arguments about a misalignment between private ownership and the efficient direction of technology, or demands for an increasing socialisation of competitive economic institutions. Socialism constitutes a rejection of understandings of competition as necessary, capitalism as natural, and society as merely a network of exchange relations among sovereign individuals.[19] Socialism is provoked by such understandings, and is primarily concerned with economic exchange, with capitalism and competition. Early socialists were 'seduced by the enormous dynamism of early industrialization', concerned only with economic institutions, and indifferent to other spheres of life.[20]

This thesis suggests that one should reconsider the challenges to which socialists were responding. Instead of responding to economic challenges, whether the introduction of machinery, shifting

[16] Such narrowness in understandings of socialism is not, of course, limited to Marxism. In his account of Icarian communism, Christopher H. Johnson scrutinises a list in *Voyage en Icarie* of luminaries whose statements appear to suggest an endorsement of Icarian communism, and concludes only that this shows 'that we are not in the presence of a great mind'. Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France*, 18.
[17] Sweezy, 'Origins of Present Day Socialism', 68.
[18] Jarrett, *Mediaeval Socialism*, 7.
[19] Parekh, 'Introduction', 3–4.
[20] Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism*, 48.

patterns of production and employment, industrialisation or intensifying exploitation, one might see socialists as responding to a different kind of challenge or crisis. One might see socialists as responding to a spiritual crisis, in which existing religious institutions were failing to achieve their true purposes, and were legitimating a damaging economic system, distracting from the truth about human society, encouraging persecution, and hindering progress. This is not to claim, of course, that Owenites are uninterested in the distribution of economic power as cause of social problems, and the redistribution of such power as their solution. However, I do argue that this thesis gives reason to suspect that accounts of socialism which focus only upon these concerns are too narrow, focusing too intently upon economic challenges as prompting the emergence of socialism and economic arguments as supplying the heart of socialism.

A broader account of socialism would recognise a wider range of interests and causes as central to socialism. This might include movements which lacked aspirations to directly transform structures of coercion, which displayed little interest in economic analysis, or which did not respond to industrialisation. Instead, they might have been more concerned by the promotion of cooperation and altruism or the extension of moralisation, regarding these as central to socialism. Such a broader account might also include an alternative vision of the intellectual pre-history of socialism. Often figures such as Charles Hall, William Ogilvie, or Thomas Spence are identified as the ancestors of socialism in virtue of their critiques of landownership or demands for the redistribution of economic resources.[21] Yet, one might ask whether they should be seen, in virtue of their interrogation of property rights, as laying the foundations for socialism. Or should instead (or also) one look towards those who are concerned with the encouragement of mutuality in social relations, or those who were concerned with transforming human character in order to bring about a social revolution?

This thesis might also prompt reconsideration of who the agent and audience of socialism are. Often socialism is imagined as addressing itself to labourers qua labourers, speaking to humans in their guise as producers. Appeal is made to the right to control one's own labour and the fruits of that labour. Labour is celebrated as the source of all wealth, and arguments are made that the distribution of power

[21] Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*; Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism, and Nostalgia*.

and resources should correspond to this fact. Claims are offered on behalf of labourers whose recompense is not proportionate to their productive contribution. This is particularly clear for Marxists, for whom a class identified by their ownership only of their own labour power is to be the revolutionary agent and was the focal point of socialist interest as the most exploited, impoverished, and yet empowered class. More recently, political theorists have understood socialism as addressing itself to moral agents, offering reasons of fairness, justice, or community which are not predicated upon one's status as a producer but can be recognised by all.[22] These are questions about who socialism is *for*, about whose identity is imbricated with socialism, about who will bring about socialism and in virtue of what. And they are questions to which Owenism is relevant, in virtue of the fact that appeal is addressed to moral agents and not to producers, to believers rather than labourers.

This thesis might prompt other questions about the nature and history of socialism. For example, should we alter the standards against which socialism should be evaluated, shifting what it means for socialism to be a success? That is, should socialism's success be judged not by the establishment and endurance of communities or by the extension of collective control over economic processes, but by the extent of a shift in the social ethos? Did the engagement with religious questions endure in later socialism? If not, then when did this change and why? Who sought and achieved such change? Alternatively, one might ask about how the contrasting religious contexts from which British and French socialism emerged, contexts which furnished challenges and the resources with which to confront those challenges, shaped the socialism which arose in each country in different ways.

It is not unusual for scholars to note that the thought and action of Owenite socialism was shaped by a theological inheritance. Arthur E. Bestor and Philip Lockley have both identified the influence of trans-Atlantic traditions of Protestant communalism.[23] Gregory Claeys described the influence of the Quakers on Owenite socialism, in particular their model of a more transparent social life, their suspicion of dissent, and their expectation of consensus.[24] J.F.C. Harrison noted that 'Owenism originated and flourished entirely within the grand era of evangelical ascendancy (c. 1800-60) and the

[22] Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*
[23] Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*; Lockley, 'Trans-Atlantic Reputations'.
[24] Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*.

doctrines, attitudes, and assumptions of enthusiastic religion permeated society at many levels', and argued that millenarianism shaped the form and content of socialism.[25] Robert A. Davis and Frank O'Hagan have argued that the idea of the environment shaping personality is rooted in theological understandings which long pre-date its claimed Enlightenment origins.[26] Others have noted the importance of scripture as a philosophical resource or a source of imagery, or how thoughts about human nature were always inevitably tied to Christian theology. Yet, the argument of this thesis is not merely that Owenite ideas, about the influence of environment upon character or about the establishment of communities as a mean to transform society, were shaped by a theological inheritance. Instead, it is that Owenites aimed at religious reform itself.

7.5 Lessons for Contemporary Socialists

The fifth and final implication which one might draw from this thesis concerns lessons for contemporary socialists. Socialists have always been divided on the question of how broad socialism should be. On one hand are those who understand socialism as primarily a matter of economic arguments about production and distribution, arguments which might appeal either because they appeal to one's interests or for reasons of justice or morality. On the other are those who view socialism as an expansive social critique and as promoting a rich and radically novel account of social life.

Advocates of a narrowly economic form of socialism argue that socialism has been damagingly muddled with irrelevant preoccupations and eccentricities. George Orwell bemoaned that 'every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, "Nature Cure" quack, pacifist, and feminist in England' flocked to socialism, and complained that these 'cranks' adulterated socialism with their embarrassing eccentricities.[27] More recently, complaints centre upon a misdirected focus 'on issues such as reforming the Gender Recognition Act to allow self-ID for transgender people'. Instead, it is

[25] Harrison, 'A New View of Mr Owen', 9.
[26] Davis and O'Hagan, *Robert Owen*.
[27] Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 194. George Orwell would have doubtless been unimpressed by William Thompson's vegetarian diet of uncooked food, which, he argued, aided his concentration.

argued, socialists 'must take our message of economic socialism and explain in practical terms the difference it will make to people's lives'. Instead of engaging in 'divisive identity politics', there should be a focus upon 'the solid socialist economics that will improve the lives of so many'.[28] The message is simple. Socialism is 'solid'; a matter of economic critique and the redistribution of economic power. And the social and cultural pursuits with which it has been entangled are not merely irrelevant or a harmless distraction but are discrediting and repellent for socialism's true constituency.[29] Others disagree. Socialism, they argue, is essentially about 'transgression', embracing the disruption and subversion of dominant social practices, which interlace in a mutually supporting, constraining lattice.[30] On such an account, socialism is not only about 'bread and butter' issues of economic security and labour rights, nor is the constituency of socialism defined in virtue of economic marginalisation and exploitation. Instead, socialism is an expansive critique of the very fabric of social relations, and a novel, radical account of how that fabric can and should be re-woven, in which economic and social transformation are inseparable and co-equal. Such an understanding of socialism therefore might include a commitment to remaking the family or an interrogation of religious questions.

In some cases, the tension between the two sides in this dispute is primarily tactical. In such cases, disagreements about how the goals of socialism are to be advanced, about how socialism might be presented so as to garner support, can conceal consensus about what those goals are and about what socialism is. The disagreement is then primarily an empirical disagreement about what would work, and particularly about what would work now. However, there are other cases in which this *is* a principled dispute about what socialism is, about the depth, range, or ambition of socialist critique, about the extent to which the socialist future will diverge from the present, and about the extent to which existing social conventions are implicated in and corrupted by exploitation or injustice. Such disputes take place between those who argue that socialism entails only the rejection of particular economic networks of production and distribution and those who maintain that socialism is a much broader assault upon oppressive social institutions.

[28] Robertson, 'To Win Back the Working Class We Must Ditch Identity Politics'.
[29] Douthat, 'The Second Defeat of Bernie Sanders'; Guastella, 'We Need a Class War, Not a Culture War'.
[30] 'Normie Socialism or Communist Transgression'.

Coming to a fuller understanding of Owenite socialism cannot settle questions about what socialism essentially is, or should be, or what socialists should do. While Owenites were important contributors to the emergence of socialism, they do not boast a monopoly over its meaning. However, they do offer a paradigmatic and important instance of socialism. As such an instance, they offer a prominent source of legitimation. Given the widespread conception of Owenites as the original, founding socialists, it is difficult to maintain that their account of socialism was, in a fundamental way, 'unsocialist'. The same tensions as to whether socialism was primarily concerned with economic questions and only secondarily with social or cultural concerns can be seen among Owenites. In her account of Owenite feminists, Barbara Taylor notes that their expansive social analysis recognised the competitive system as causing oppression and conflict not only in employment and in economic exchanges, but also in gendered and domestic relationships. However, there were still competing concerns about whether women's participation in labour was undermining the standing of skilled workers, and by the 1840s the link 'between women's freedom and class emancipation' was coming to disintegrate.[31] The absence of women from decision-making positions in organisations and the reliance upon traditional gendered roles in Owenite communities further suggests that, in the order of priorities, gender equality was to be sacrificed for political expedience.[32] Similar tensions existed as to whether theological discussions were relevant to socialism or whether they were, at best, a distraction or, at worst, harmful and discrediting. Nonetheless, despite the existence of such tensions about the centrality of gender equality and of religious questions to Owenite socialism, the account offered here does support an understanding of socialism as offering a broad cultural critique and as promising the creation of alternative, egalitarian social practices. It is clear that many Owenites perceived these to be an important constituent of socialism.

This encourages one to think about social*ism*, and not merely social*ists*, as pursuing an expansive social critique. It suggests that socialism, rightly understood, is not limited to an economic critique, accompanied by conciliation to potentially inegalitarian social mores and practices. Nor does socialism involve an order of priority, in which the remaking of social values and attitudes, which might include

[31] Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 263.
[32] Kolmerton, 'Egalitarian Promises and Inegalitarian Practices'; Taylor, *Eve & the New Jerusalem*, 219–22.

those related to gender, race, or sexuality, is considered as a secondary objective or auxiliary benefit, perhaps one which might flow inevitably from structural economic change. Instead socialism confers central importance, as both a means and an end, on the reimagination of social values, and the transformation of social institutions so as to reflect and promote those values. This includes institutions such as the family, religion, or education, the re-making of which is integral to socialism. Instead of accepting dominant social mores and conventions, socialists like the Owenites interrogate and challenge them. The Owenites are not, of course, simply a model to be emulated, nor can their example directly instruct contemporary socialists as to what they should do, now. Instead, they offer an example of a foundational instance of socialists who were committed to a broad social critique, and for whom such a critique was not a compromise or dilution of socialism, but rather the expression of its true nature.

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